CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ASSESSMENT SYSTEM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN THE ERA OF THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM

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Abstract :

This research aims to critically evaluate the assessment system in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in the era of the Independent Curriculum with a qualitative approach. The focus of the study lies in how teachers apply assessment principles in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, as well as the extent to which the evaluation system used is able to represent the achievement of students' competencies holistically. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation at several junior high schools in a given region. The results of the study show that there is still a gap between the ideal concept of assessment mandated in the Independent Curriculum and real practice in the field. Teachers tend to emphasize the cognitive aspect more and ignore the assessment of students' attitudes and spirituality. In addition, the lack of teacher training and understanding of holistic evaluation instruments is the main obstacle in the development of a comprehensive assessment system. This study recommends the need to improve teachers' competence in designing evaluation instruments that are contextual and in accordance with the characteristics of Islamic Religious Education.

Keywords: *Evaluation, Islamic Religious Education, Independent Curriculum*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is one of the important components in Indonesia's national education system which aims to shape the character, morals, and spirituality of students (Muhaimin, 2010). In this context, the evaluation of PAI learning not only assesses cognitive aspects, but also includes affective and psychomotor dimensions that represent Islamic values in real life (Zainal Arifin, 2012). Therefore, the assessment system in PAI must be designed holistically and contextually in order to be able to measure the overall competencies of students as a whole.

The Independent Curriculum is an idea from the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, Nadiem Makarim, which was conveyed in a speech commemorating National Teachers' Day on November 25, 2019. Nadiem stated that the Independent Curriculum is an atmosphere where schools, teachers, and students have the freedom to innovate and learn independently and creatively (Izza et al., 2020).

Along with the enactment of the Independent Curriculum by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, there has been a shift in the educational paradigm that emphasizes more on student-centered learning, differentiation, and character strengthening through the Pancasila Student profile (RIFAI, Muh Husyain, et al, 2024). This curriculum requires teachers,

including PAI teachers, to not only teach religious material, but also assess the process of internalizing Islamic teaching values in students' attitudes and behaviors. This is where the urgency of updating the evaluation system becomes even more important.

However, in practice, the implementation of the evaluation system in accordance with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum still faces various challenges. Many teachers still use a conventional assessment approach that focuses on written test results, while spiritual, social attitudes, and religious practices often go unnoticed (Rahmawati, 2021). This raises a critical question: is the current PAI assessment system really capable of representing the true purpose of religious education?

Based on this background, this study was conducted to critically evaluate the assessment system in PAI education using a qualitative approach. This research aims to explore in depth how teachers understand, design, and implement the PAI evaluation system within the framework of the Independent Curriculum and identify the obstacles faced in the process.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to understand in depth the practice of the assessment system in the learning of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the era of the Independent Curriculum (Moleong, 2017). The location of the research is MI Nurul Huda Banjarmasin which has implemented the Independent Curriculum. The main informants were PAI teachers, supported by principals and students, who were selected using purposive sampling techniques (Creswell, 2016). Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation studies in the form of learning tool analysis and student assessment results (Sugiyono, 2019). Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification (Miles, 2014). The validity of the data is maintained by triangulating sources and methods, as well as confirming data to informants (Sutopo, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the implementation of the assessment system in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in three junior high schools that have implemented the Independent Curriculum is still not fully in accordance with the principles of holistic assessment that are characteristic of the curriculum. Based on interviews and observations, it was found that PAI teachers are still dominant in assessing cognitive aspects through multiple-choice questions and descriptions. Affective and spiritual assessments tend to be done informally and not systematically documented. This can be seen from the statement of one of the PAI teachers at MI Nurul Huda**.**

"We know we have to judge attitudes and worship, but there is no measuring tool. Sometimes it is only based on the student's impressions or habits." (Teacher PAI MI Nurul Huda)

These findings indicate that the evaluation does not reflect an authentic assessment approach that includes direct observations, portfolios, journals, or projects that should be part of the Independent Curriculum approach1. In fact, according to Zainal Arifin, assessments in religious education must include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor in a balanced manner in order to be able to describe learning achievement as a whole (Zainal Arifin, 2012).

From the observations made, it can be seen that the assessment of students' spiritual aspects is generally carried out implicitly, for example by recording attendance during congregational prayers or activeness in PAI lessons. However, teachers do not have a detailed evaluation rubric or standardized indicators to assess the quality of students' religious attitudes. This is in line with the statement of one of the teachers: "*Sometimes we just see if the child prays diligently or not, but we don't know how to judge it fairly.*" (MI Teacher Nurul Huda)

This issue reinforces Zubaedi's findings, that Islamic education tends to be trapped in symbolic measurement if it is not accompanied by contextual and applicative assessment instruments (Zubaedi, 2011).

In the affective aspect, only some teachers try to record the development of students' attitudes through anecdotal notes or attitude reflections. Most teachers rely on general assessments such as "good", "adequate", or "need coaching", with no measurable indicators. This is the main criticism of the implementation of character assessment in PAI. According to Hasan, without clear indicators, attitude assessment will be subjective and difficult to be used as a basis for further coaching (Hasan, 2013)

In terms of instrument development, teachers admit that they need concrete practical guidance to develop project-based assessment formats, portfolios, and students' religious reflections. PAI teacher from MI Nurul Huda revealed:

"*We want to make a portfolio assessment, but we don't know what it will look like. If there is an example from the service, it will be very helpful.*" (PAI MI teacher Nurul Huda)

This shows the weak role of training and educational supervision for teachers in the aspect of learning evaluation. In fact, as Wiggins and McTighe say, good assessments should be designed in harmony with learning objectives and provide space for students to demonstrate their understanding meaningfully (Wiggins dan McTighe 2005). Overall, these results and discussion show that there are three major trends in the practice of PAI evaluation in the era of the Independent Curriculum: 1) The dominance of cognitive assessment, which ignores the affective and spiritual dimensions. 2) Lack of tools and training, which hinders the application of holistic evaluation. 3) The emergence of local initiatives, which can be the embryo of the development of an evaluation model based on Islamic values and local contextualization.

The discussion also leads to a gap between the ideals of the curriculum and the reality in the field. The Independent Curriculum encourages flexible and contextual evaluation, but teachers are not equipped with technical training and practical instruments. As revealed by the principal in this study, "We support

teachers to be creative, but there is not enough technical guidance from the office or ministry." This corroborates the findings of Ramadhan, that limited training and policy support are the main obstacles to the implementation of holistic assessment in schools (Ramadhan, 2022).

In addition, there are administrative obstacles that also affect the quality of evaluation. The teachers interviewed complained of administrative burdens and hectic teaching schedules, so they did not have enough time to prepare a comprehensive assessment instrument. This phenomenon is inversely proportional to the spirit of the Independent Curriculum which actually wants to provide space for reflection for teachers in evaluating the learning process of students (Mulyasa, 2013).

However, some teachers point to innovative local initiatives, such as the use of student reflective journals, small da'wah assignments, or assessments of daily worship practices. Although it has not been standardized, it shows the potential for the development of an evaluation system based on Islamic values and local contexts. Efforts like this are in line with the concept of contextual evaluation, where the assessment process considers the environmental conditions and background of students (Suyadi, 2020).

From the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that the implementation of PAI assessments in the era of the Independent Curriculum still faces a number of structural and technical challenges. Teachers need support in the form of training, sample instruments, and policies that ease the administrative burden so that PAI evaluations can fully reflect spiritual, social, and intellectual values.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of qualitative research conducted in three junior high schools, it can be concluded that the assessment system in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the era of the Independent Curriculum still faces various obstacles in its implementation holistically. Evaluation is still dominated by cognitive aspects, while affective and spiritual assessments have not been developed systematically and measurably. PAI teachers generally do not have clear instruments or rubrics to assess students' religious attitudes and behaviors objectively and sustainably.

The gap between the ideals of the Independent Curriculum and the reality of implementation in the field can be seen from the lack of technical training, the lack of applicable evaluation guidelines, and the administrative burden that limits teachers' creativity in developing authentic assessments. Nevertheless, there are local initiatives that show potential for development, such as the use of religious journals, student da'wah assignments, and observation of contextual worship practices. Unfortunately, these practices are still sporadic and have not been supported systemically by educational institutions or related agencies.

Thus, the transformation of the PAI evaluation system within the framework of the Independent Curriculum requires comprehensive support in the form of continuous training, the provision of evaluation instruments in

accordance with Islamic values and the Pancasila Student Profile, and the strengthening of the role of teachers as learning evaluators oriented to the development of students' character and spirituality.

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