



RECONCEPTUALIZING ASSESSMENT IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF MADRASAH EVALUATION PRACTICES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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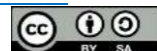
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Abstract

This research aims to recontextualize the concept of assessment in Islamic education, particularly in madrasah institutions, to align with 21st-century demands. Using a library research approach, this study critically examines academic literature, educational policies, and the results of previous studies on the evaluation of learning in madrasahs. The analysis used thematic and reflective synthesis to identify conceptual gaps and opportunities for developing a more comprehensive assessment model. The results of the study show that assessment practices in madrasahs are still dominated by a cognitive approach and by the measurement of learning outcomes oriented toward memorization. The affective, spiritual, and social dimensions have not received adequate attention in the evaluation system. This condition underscores the urgent need to build an integrative, holistic, and Islamic-values-based assessment paradigm. Assessment is not only a tool for measuring academic achievement but also a means of building students' character, morals, and spiritual awareness. This study emphasizes that recontextualizing madrasah assessments is a strategic step toward improving the quality of Islamic education. The theoretical implications lie in strengthening the concept of value-based evaluation, while the practical implications encourage teachers and educational institutions to develop assessment models that are humanistic and oriented towards the formation of human beings.

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INTRODUCTION

Assessment in education plays a strategic role as an instrument for mapping learning outcomes, improving the quality of learning, and ensuring the accountability of educational institutions. In the context of Islamic education, especially in madrasas, assessment has a broader meaning: it is not just a tool for measuring knowledge, but also a means to assess students' spiritual, moral, and social development. However, assessment practices in madrasas remain dominated by traditional approaches that emphasize mastery of religious texts and formal cognitive exams, while the affective and spiritual dimensions have not been systematically integrated (Isnawati, 2024).

Various studies show that madrasah teachers are aware of the importance of formative and summative assessments, but their implementation is still limited to conventional forms such as written tests and memorization (Maulana et al., 2024). This indicates a gap between the theoretical understanding of assessments that should be formative and support assessment for learning and the reality of practice in the field. In addition, the low achievement of Indonesian students in international studies such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) also reveals structural challenges in the educational evaluation system, including in madrasas (Alfaruqi & Nurwahidah, 2024). This condition shows that madrasah assessments are not fully able to answer the global demands for critical thinking competencies, literacy, and character in the 21st century.

Several previous studies have highlighted the application of alternative assessment models, such as authentic assessments in Arabic language learning (Fitriani, Zaman, & Imron, 2024) and the evaluation of assessment instruments based on modern assessment theories (Amin & Kurnia Sari, 2024). However, most of these studies remain practical and limited to a particular subject or institution. There has been little research that has examined conceptually how the madrasah assessment paradigm can be reconstructed to be in harmony with Islamic epistemology and relevant to the global framework of modern education. In other words, there is a gap between contemporary assessment theory and the philosophical values of Islamic education, which emphasize the holistic formation of human beings.

The urgency of this research is increasingly evident amid a shift in the 21st-century education paradigm, which demands that assessments serve not only as tools to measure learning outcomes but also as instruments for developing competencies and character. Approaches such as authentic assessment, performance-based assessment, and outcome-based education have become mainstream in the modern education system, but their adaptation in madrasas remains limited and lacks a strong conceptual basis from an Islamic perspective. Meanwhile, key values in Islamic education—such as *tauhid*, *akhlak karimah*, and *tazkiyah an-nafs*—require an assessment approach that not only measures external outcomes but also assesses students' inner development (Abdullah, 2020).

Thus, efforts are needed to reconceptualize assessment in Islamic education through a critical examination of evaluation practices in madrasahs and philosophical studies of the underlying values of Islamic education. This research seeks to fill this gap by reviewing the epistemological foundations of madrasah assessment and proposing a new conceptual framework that integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions. Using a library research approach, this article aims to integrate the global literature on assessment theory with Islamic pedagogical principles to develop a contextual, inclusive, and relevant conceptual model to strengthen the quality of madrasah education in the modern era.

On the other hand, the urgency of this research becomes even clearer when we consider that the 21st century demands a fundamental change in how we understand learning outcomes: not only measuring *what students know*, but also *what students can do*, *who they become*, and *how they contribute socially and morally*. Paradigms such as outcome-based education, authentic assessment, and an emphasis on 21st-century character and skills have been extensively reviewed in the general education literature but have been relatively little systematically integrated into madrasa frameworks. Against this background, it is essential to reconceptualize assessment in Islamic education, especially in madrasahs, so that the assessment framework is not only technical and cognitive, but also coherent with Islamic values such as *tauḥīd*, *'ibādah*, *akhlāq*, and the formation of human beings.

Thus, this study aims to conduct a critical review of evaluation practices in madrasahs in the 21st century and propose a new conceptual framework of assessment that integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions in the context of Islamic education. With a library research approach, this research will synthesize global and local literature on assessment theory and practice, Islamic pedagogical values, and the challenges of madrasah education reform. Thus, it is hoped that the research results will not only add to the body of knowledge but also provide an operational framework that policymakers and madrasah practitioners across various Islamic countries can adapt.

METHOD

Research Design

This research uses a library research approach with a conceptual and analytical orientation. This approach was chosen because the main purpose of the research was not to collect empirical data, but to analyze, interpret, and reconstruct key concepts regarding assessment in Islamic education, especially in madrasahs. This approach allows researchers to integrate modern assessment theory, Islamic educational values, and madrasah evaluation practices in a coherent new conceptual framework. The library research approach in educational studies emphasizes the importance of collecting credible and relevant scientific sources, then conducting critical analysis to identify knowledge gaps (research gaps) and develop new theoretical understandings

(Snyder, 2019). Thus, this study emphasizes conceptual analysis and theoretical synthesis over empirical field testing.

Literature Sources and Criteria

Research data was obtained from secondary scientific sources consisting of:

- 1) International journal articles indexed by Scopus, DOAJ, and Web of Science that discuss educational assessment, Islamic education, and madrasah reform;
- 2) Academic books and previous research results relevant to assessment theory and epistemology of Islamic education;
- 3) National and international assessment policy documents and standards (such as *Permenag No. 792/2023 concerning Madrasah National Standards* and the *UNESCO Learning Assessment Framework*).

The selected literature criteria include:

- 1) Thematic relevance to the issue of Islamic education assessment and madrasahs;
- 2) Published over the past two decades (2005–2025) to capture the cutting-edge dynamics of 21st-century education;
- 3) It is peer-reviewed and can be accessed scientifically through academic databases.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process involved systematic searches using keywords such as *“Islamic education assessment,” “madrasah evaluation,” “authentic assessment in Islamic schools,”* and *“quality assurance in religious education.”* The search was conducted through academic platforms such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, and SpringerLink. Initial search results yielded more than 80 relevant publications, which were then selected based on relevance, topicality, and source credibility. After going through the screening process, about 40 main sources are used as core references for further analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is carried out through three main stages:

- 1) Descriptive-Conceptual Analysis: At this stage, the researcher examines the literature to illustrate how the concept of assessment in madrasahs has developed and been implemented across various contexts. The analysis focuses on the paradigm and basic principles of assessment in Islamic education.
- 2) Critical-Comparative Analysis: This stage compares different assessment approaches in general education and Islamic education. The goal is to identify epistemological differences and find common ground between Islamic values (such as *tauhid*, *akhlak karimah*, and *tazkiyah*) and modern assessment principles (such as authentic assessment, competency-based assessment, and formative evaluation).

- 3) Conceptual Synthesis and Reconstruction: The final stage is to build a new conceptual model that represents the relationship between the goals of Islamic education and 21st-century assessment. This model is expected to be a conceptual basis for the development of madrasah assessment policies in the future.

The analysis follows a conceptual synthesis approach that emphasizes the argumentative integration of various literature sources to produce new theories (Webster & Watson, 2002). Conceptual validity is maintained through the triangulation of literature sources and the consistency between philosophical analysis and the results of relevant empirical studies.

Academic Validity

To maintain the validity of the conceptual findings, this study applies four principles of academic rigor in library research:

- 1) Credibility – ensuring all scientific sources come from verified and peer-reviewed publications;
- 2) Dependability – follows transparent and replicable literature search and selection procedures;
- 3) Confirmability – documenting all references and conceptual arguments with explicit citations;
- 4) Transferability – linking the results of the analysis to the global context of Islamic education so that it can be applied across countries.

With this method, this research is expected not only to enrich the academic treasure of Islamic education assessment but also to provide a new conceptual framework that can be used to develop an integrative, holistic, and relevant madrasah evaluation system that is relevant to the needs of the 21st century.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Assessment in the context of madrasah education is not just a tool to measure learning outcomes, but is a reflection of the epistemological paradigm that underlies the way of thinking, values, and goals of Islamic education. In the tradition of classical Islamic education, evaluation assesses not only cognitive but also moral, spiritual, and social aspects that shape students' personalities. However, in the context of 21st-century education, assessment is undergoing a shift in function: from a mere tool of quality control to a strategic instrument for developing competence, innovation, and character (Adzidzah & Yudiawan, 2024). This shift requires madrasahs to review their assessment frameworks to remain relevant to current demands without losing their Islamic identity.

This literature review shows that the practice of madrasah assessment in various Islamic countries faces conceptual and practical challenges. On the one hand, education modernization demands objective, transparent, and competency-based standards; on the other hand, the spiritual values and manners that are at the core of Islamic education are difficult to measure with quantitative instruments alone (Al-Attas, 1993; Rahman & Yusuf, 2022).

Therefore, the recontextualization of madrasah assessments is not only a technical discourse but a philosophical effort to affirm the relationship between science and values, between academic evaluation and moral formation.

Traditional Paradigm of Assessment in Madrasah

The tradition of classical Islamic education is rooted in a learning model based on *ta'lim* and *tarbiyah*, placing the teacher as the primary authority on knowledge. Assessments are conducted through *talaqqi* (direct testing), memorization, and oral exams that emphasize the reproduction aspect of knowledge (Azra, 2019). This approach has the power to maintain the intellectual continuity of Islam and ensure the accuracy of the transmission of religious sciences. However, its orientation focused on memorizing texts often overlooks the analytical and reflective aspects needed in the modern social context.

In contemporary madrasahs, this pattern is still widely found in Indonesia, Pakistan, and some Middle Eastern countries. Abdullah (2020) shows that more than 70% of madrasahs in Southeast Asia still rely on written and memorization exams as the leading indicators of learning achievement. The assessment system is summative—that is, focused on final results—and pays less attention to formative assessments that support the learning process. As a result, assessment results do not function as learning feedback, but rather only as an administrative tool to determine graduation.

This traditional approach also shows an imbalance between the spiritual and intellectual dimensions. Although madrasahs emphasize the formation of religious character, the evaluation methods used have not captured students' spiritual depth. This creates a paradox: religious values are taught in depth, yet assessed with cognitive and mechanistic instruments (Hasan, 2021). In the long run, this can hamper madrasahs' ability to produce graduates who can contribute critically to modern society.

From the epistemological perspective of Islamic education, assessment should be a means of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) and the development of *adab* (ethics of knowledge). However, in practice, these values are often subordinated to administrative pressures and number-oriented national standards policies. This condition underscores the need for recontextualizing madrasah assessments even more urgently.

Challenges of Madrasah Assessment in the 21st Era

The 21st century is marked by a paradigm shift in education towards learner-centered education, competency-based learning, and the integration of digital technology (OECD, 2019). In this framework, assessment no longer functions as a selection mechanism, but as an instrument for developing higher-order thinking skills. However, research shows that most madrasahs have not been able to adapt this paradigm. A study by Nuryadin (2023) found that assessments in Indonesian madrasahs are still dominated by multiple-choice

formats and rote exams, with very little use of authentic portfolios, projects, or assessments.

Structural and cultural factors can explain these limitations. First, many madrasah teachers lack adequate professional training in designing innovative assessments (Sulaiman & Ibrahim, 2020). Second, madrasahs often face bureaucratic pressure to meet quantitative performance indicators, leading the assessment process to be reduced to mere administrative compliance. Third, there is an epistemological tension between traditional Islamic values that emphasize adherence to textual authority and the global demands of education that demand autonomy of thought and creativity (Hasan, 2021).

In addition, new challenges have also emerged in the era of digitalization. Online assessment systems require adequate technological infrastructure and high digital literacy, while many madrasahs in rural areas lack equal access to these resources (UNESCO, 2023). This widens the gap between advanced madrasahs and traditional ones, thus strengthening dualism in the Islamic education system. Therefore, the modernization of assessment in madrasahs cannot be carried out uniformly, but must take into account the social, cultural, and spiritual context of each institution. The biggest challenge lies not in the technology but in translating Islamic values into an assessment framework that remains fair, inclusive, and meaningful.

Recontextualization of Assessment in Islamic Education

Recontextualizing assessment means shifting the paradigm from evaluating results to assessing processes and values. In Al-Attas's view (1993), Islamic education aims to form civilized human beings, not just skilled ones. Therefore, assessments in madrasahs must assess three main dimensions: *'aql* (cognitive), *qalb* (affective-spiritual), and *'amal* (social practice). This approach aligns with the concept of integrative education, which balances knowledge, faith, and charity as the core of education (Zarkasyi, 2021).

Conceptual research by Huda and Rosyada (2022) emphasizes the importance of building an ethical assessment framework in Islamic education. Assessment must not be separated from the principles of *amanah* and *hisbah* (moral accountability), in which the teacher serves as both assessor and spiritual guide. In this context, the validity of an assessment is measured not only by statistical reliability but also by honesty, intention, and fairness in its implementation.

Several alternative assessment models can be developed, including authentic, project-based, and portfolio assessment, which assess student competence in real-life contexts (Wiggins, 2012). This approach allows madrasahs to determine critical, collaborative, and creative thinking skills without sacrificing Islamic values. However, implementing the model requires institutional culture changes and increased teacher capacity to develop comprehensive assessment rubrics.

Recontextualization of assessments must also consider the integration between spiritual and technological dimensions. Digital platforms can be used to monitor students' moral and spiritual development on an ongoing basis, for

example, through reflective journals or digital learning portfolios. Thus, madrasah assessment can move towards a transcendent yet modern model – transcendent in value, modern in methodology.

Towards a Value and Competency-Based Madrasah Assessment Model

Based on a synthesis of various studies, it can be concluded that the assessment of the ideal madrasah in the 21st century should balance 21st-century competencies (critical, creative, communicative, and collaborative) with Islamic values (faith, adab, and morals). This model views assessment not only as an instrument of measurement but also as a means of forming an integral personality.

Its application can be done through three main strategies—first, the design of an integrative assessment that combines spiritual and academic indicators in the rubric. For example, in social project assessments, teachers assess not only the quality of arguments but also students' honesty, responsibility, and empathy for society. Second, strengthening formative assessments that provide continuous feedback to encourage self-reflection and lifelong learning (Brookhart, 2018). Third, digitizing madrasah assessments to increase the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of the evaluation process (UNESCO, 2023).

This model has strategic implications for Islamic education policy. First, educational institutions need to strengthen teachers' capacity for literacy assessment. Second, accreditation institutions need to adjust quality assessment instruments to accommodate affective and spiritual dimensions. Third, there needs to be cross-institutional collaboration among the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Islamic universities, and international institutions to develop grade- and competency-based madrasah assessment standards.

Thus, the recontextualization of madrasah assessments is not just a technical revision but an epistemological step towards Islamic education that is more humanistic, reflective, and globally competitive. Assessment is no longer merely an instrument, but a bridge between knowledge and values, between education and civilization.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that assessment in madrasah education not only serves as a measuring tool for learning outcomes but also as an instrument for character formation and the integration of Islamic values. In the context of Islamic education, assessment has a spiritual, moral, and social meaning rooted in the concepts of accountability and justice. This means that student assessment is not only about what is known, but also about how that knowledge shapes their attitudes and behaviors in real life. The analysis shows that assessment practices in madrassas remain primarily focused on memorization and final results, while the dimensions of process, character, and spirituality have not been adequately measured. This requires a paradigm shift

toward a more comprehensive, humanistic assessment that integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in a balanced manner. In the 21st-century perspective, madrasah assessments should focus on competency-based assessment, self-reflection, and the formation of civilized personalities.

The implications of this finding are quite broad. Theoretically, the recontextualization of madrasah assessments opens space for the development of evaluation concepts rooted in Islamic values yet adaptable to global dynamics. Assessments can be designed as part of a learning process that educates, guides, and fosters moral awareness. In practice, teachers in madrasahs need to develop assessment competencies to assess students' critical, collaborative, and spiritual thinking skills. Educational institutions and policymakers also need to review the quality assurance system to place character and moral values at the heart of education quality standards. In addition, the application of digital technology in madrasah assessments can be an effective means to create a more objective, transparent, and sustainable assessment system. Digital platforms can help teachers conduct formative, reflective, and personal evaluations of student development. However, the application of technology must still be guided by ethical principles and human values to avoid making the assessment purely mechanistic.

This research has several limitations. First, because it uses a literature review approach, the analysis results are more conceptual and have not been verified with empirical field data. Second, the discussion still focuses on the context of madrasahs in Indonesia, so the generalization of the Islamic education system to other countries remains limited. Third, there is no integrative assessment model that has been systematically tested in the context of real implementation in educational units. Given these limitations, further empirical research is needed to test the effectiveness of an integrative assessment model that simultaneously evaluates academic, spiritual, and social aspects. Classroom action research and longitudinal studies in madrasahs can be conducted to see the long-term impact of value-based assessments on students' character and achievement. In addition, comparative studies among Islamic countries are essential for exploring best practices in developing evaluation systems that are contextual yet rooted in the universal values of Islamic education.

In closing, the recontextualization of madrasah assessments is a strategic step toward realizing quality, characterful Islamic education. The renewal of assessment is not only a technical effort, but also a philosophical movement to restore the spirit of education as a process of forming the perfect human being. Through fair, reflective, and spiritually valuable assessments, madrasahs can become centers for nurturing a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also noble in character and ready to face the challenges of modern civilization with a strong Islamic identity.

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