

CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING ASSESSMENT IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION (PAI) LEARNING IN MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH: POLICY AND PRACTICE ANALYSIS

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Article Info:

Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Apr 18, 2026	May 16, 2026	May 28, 2026	Jun 2, 2026

Abstract

Assessment in Islamic Education at the elementary madrasah level requires a holistic approach that captures not only students' cognitive achievement but also their affective and psychomotor development. This study analyzes the challenges of assessing Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*/PAI) learning at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* and proposes practical strategies to strengthen holistic evaluation. A qualitative descriptive design based on library research was employed, using secondary data from journal articles, books, and policy documents. Data were collected through document review and analyzed through evidence synthesis and triangulation across sources to examine assessment practices in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The findings indicate a persistent imbalance in PAI assessment, with teachers tending to prioritize cognitive and written assessments because they are easier to administer, while affective and psychomotor dimensions remain under-assessed despite their central role in shaping students' religious character. The main barriers include limited teacher competence in authentic assessment, insufficient practical instruments and rubrics, limited time for sustained observation, heavy

administrative workloads, variable institutional support, cultural resistance, and gaps in policy guidance. The study recommends sustained practice-oriented teacher training and mentoring, the development of simple and context-sensitive affective and psychomotor rubrics, the use of portfolio-based assessment models, timetable adjustments to support routine observation, and low-cost technology such as mobile applications and video portfolios to streamline documentation. Policy support is also needed through exemplar instruments, quality-oriented monitoring, and implementation incentives. This study contributes to Islamic education assessment discourse by emphasizing that valid and meaningful PAI evaluation must reflect students' moral and spiritual development as well as academic learning.

Keywords: Islamic Education Assessment; Holistic Evaluation; Authentic Assessment; *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*; Religious Character Development.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial process for shaping the quality of human resources, both intellectually and character-wise. Education serves not only as a means of transferring knowledge but also shapes students' attitudes, morals, ethics, and responsibilities in their daily lives. In the context of Islamic education, the formation of religious character is a primary goal of the learning process (Murtadlo, 2018). Therefore, Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*/PAI) learning in Islamic Elementary Schools (MI) emphasizes not only cognitive mastery of the material but also the formation of students' religious attitudes and behaviors through the habituation of worship and the instilling of Islamic values from an early age (Hardaker & Sabki, 2018).

In the PAI learning process, assessment is a crucial component for determining the level of learning success. Assessment is not limited to knowledge but also encompasses the affective and psychomotor aspects of students (Sumarni, 2018). It is because the primary goal of APAI learning is to develop students who understand religion and can practice Islamic values in their daily lives. However, the implementation of PAI learning assessments in Islamic elementary schools (MI) still faces various challenges. Research on PAI learning evaluations in Islamic elementary schools (*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*) indicates that teachers often struggle to conduct authentic assessments, particularly of students' attitudes and spiritual aspects, which require continuous, in-depth observation. (Asy'ari, 2024).

Another frequently encountered problem is teachers' limited competence in developing assessment instruments that align with the curriculum. Furthermore, many teachers still focus more on cognitive assessment than affective and psychomotor aspects. However, PAI learning requires a balance between these three aspects to achieve character education goals optimally. Research on the challenges of evaluating the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in Islamic elementary schools (MI) indicates that a lack of training in learning evaluation, time constraints, and complex assessment administration hinder optimal implementation of learning evaluation (Wati, 2024).

Furthermore, technological developments in the digital era also pose new challenges to the PAI learning evaluation system. Teachers are required to adapt assessment methods to advances in information technology to make the evaluation process more effective and engaging for students. However, not all teachers have adequate skills in utilizing technology as a learning evaluation tool. This situation has resulted in the PAI learning assessment process in some schools still being conducted conventionally and not fully reflecting students' overall development (Anwar et al., 2025).

Previous research also explains that evaluating PAI learning requires a distinct approach because it relates to the formation of students' character and religious habits. Evaluation cannot be conducted solely through written tests; it also requires observation, interviews, assessments of religious practices, and the habituation of students' daily behavior (Hamurdani et al., 2023). Therefore, teachers play an important role in determining the success of PAI learning assessment by using appropriate evaluation strategies that align with the characteristics of students at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level (Hasbullah, 2023).

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aimed to understand and describe in-depth the challenges of assessment in PAI learning in Islamic Elementary Schools (MI (Rijali, 2019; Sugiyono, 2017)). Through this approach, researchers obtained a more comprehensive picture of the various obstacles teachers face in the learning evaluation process, particularly in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of students' learning (Creswell, 2018).

The research was conducted through library research using various relevant scientific sources, including journals, books, scientific articles, and previous research findings on the

evaluation of PAI learning in MI (Ahmed, Mohammed, Arsalan, et al., 2025; Eleanor et al., 2020). The library research approach was chosen because the research focuses on analyzing concepts, theories, and prior research on the challenges of assessing PAI learning. The data used in this study are secondary data obtained from various reliable sources relevant to the research topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Data collection techniques were conducted through documentation and literature review. Documentation was used to collect data from journal articles, research results, and documents related to the PAI learning assessment system in Islamic Elementary Schools. Meanwhile, the literature review examined various theories and research findings addressing learning evaluation, authentic assessment techniques, and the challenges teachers face in implementing PAI learning evaluation.

The primary instrument in this research is the researcher herself (a human instrument), who plays a role in collecting, selecting, analyzing, and interpreting data from various sources. In the data analysis process, this study uses qualitative descriptive analysis techniques, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involves selecting information relevant to the research focus and presenting the data systematically for easy understanding. The final stage is drawing conclusions based on the results of analyzing the various sources reviewed (Ahmed, Mohammed, Nashwan, et al., 2025; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2015).

To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation techniques by comparing several journals and scientific references related to the research topic (Ilhami et al., 2024). Thus, the results are expected to provide an objective and in-depth overview of the challenges of assessing PAI learning in MI and serve as a reference for teachers and educational institutions in improving the quality of learning evaluations.

RESULTS

Understanding Islamic Education (PAI) Learning Assessment and Its Challenges in MI

Assessment in Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*/PAI) learning serves more than just measuring mastery of material; it is a tool for assessing the development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies that are interrelated in shaping students' religious personalities (Majid, 2017). In the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) environment, the affective dimension—such as religious attitudes, the internalization of moral values, and

worship habits—plays a fundamental role, as religious education aims to shape children's behavior and spiritual identity rather than merely transfer factual knowledge (Hardaker & Sabki, 2018). Therefore, the PAI assessment framework should ideally be holistic, combining quantitative (written tests) and qualitative instruments (observation, portfolios, self- and inter-student assessments) to capture the subtler aspects of religious values and practices.

However, the reality on the ground shows an imbalance in assessment practices: teachers tend to emphasize cognitive aspects that are easier to measure and score, while affective and psychomotor dimensions are often neglected because they are difficult to measure directly and require repeated observation (Asy'ari, 2024; Wati, 2024). The reliance on written tests makes Islamic Religious Education assessment reductionist—assessing "what is known" more than "how to behave" or "how deeply the values are internalized." As a result, the assessment does not fully reflect PAI's goal in MI, namely, the formation of a consistent religious character in daily actions.

The operational constraints reported in the study shed light on the problem's root causes: teachers' lack of understanding of authentic assessment techniques, difficulty in developing valid and reliable affective and psychomotor instruments, limited time for comprehensive observations, and high administrative burdens (Hamurdani et al., 2023). These factors reinforce each other—for example, without adequate training, teachers feel unsure about using portfolios or observation rubrics, opting for quick, yet less precise, written instruments. Furthermore, school culture and curriculum demands often prioritize measurable academic assessments, leaving little room for assessing religious values.

To address these issues, sound and appropriate strategies are needed, including: First, increasing teacher capacity through practical training on authentic assessment (e.g., the use of affective rubrics, systematic observation techniques, performance assessments, and portfolios). Second, simplifying and standardizing affective/psychomotor assessment instruments to make them more practical and easier to administer at the elementary school level. Third, scheduling learning time that includes routine observation moments (e.g., extracurricular activities, religious practices, and project assignments) so that affective assessment is not separated from learning activities. Fourth, utilizing simple technology (observation note applications, video portfolios) to reduce the administrative burden without sacrificing the quality of assessment data.

Policy implications involve the roles of the religious education office/Ministry of Religious Affairs, supervisors, and madrasah management: the curriculum and assessment guidelines need to provide clear space for affective and psychomotor assessments, including examples of rubrics and ready-to-use instruments; ongoing training programs should be a priority; and monitoring and supervision should be directed at evaluating the quality of assessments, not just administrative compliance. With a combination of teacher capacity building, instrument adaptation, realistic timetables, and policy support, Islamic Religious Education assessment in MI can transform into a more holistic and meaningful practice—reflecting the true purpose of religious education.

Assessing affective and spiritual aspects in Islamic Education (PAI) demands a paradigm shift from merely testing cognitive knowledge to continuously measuring behavior and values. Aspects such as tolerance, honesty, discipline, and responsibility are contextual and situational; therefore, assessment requires consistent observation across various activities (lessons, worship, social interactions). Without a clear observation framework, affective assessment tends to be subjective and susceptible to teacher bias, for example, judging based on personal closeness, the day's atmosphere, or first impressions (Hasbullah, 2023). Therefore, the results are not valid as a basis for feedback on student character development.

Assessment instrument constraints exacerbate these validity issues. Simple instruments, such as global-scale assessment sheets or checklists without measurable behavioral indicators, make the interpretation of results unclear. Authentic assessment, ideally using detailed rubrics, anecdotal notes, portfolios, and self- and peer assessments, has not been widely implemented (Hidayati et al., 2022). As a result, the picture of students' affective and spiritual competencies is fragmented, with some aspects recorded and others remembered by teachers, making planning for character development less grounded in robust data (Anderson & Bourke, 2013).

Teachers' administrative burdens add to the complexity of assessment practices in Islamic schools. MI teachers are often responsible for multiple subjects, extracurricular activities, and classroom administration. As the tasks of entering grades, compiling reports, and documenting observations pile up, time for in-depth observation, reflection on results, and the development of high-quality instruments becomes limited (Kane & Staiger, 2012). This situation encourages the practice of "quick assessments" or reliance on formative

assessments with limited evidence, thereby decreasing the quality of evaluations and leading schools to lose sight of the longitudinal picture of students' affective development.

Besides time and workload, teachers' lack of professional capacity is a determining factor. Many teachers are unfamiliar with competency-based assessment techniques or authentic assessments, which require skills in developing rubrics, conducting informative formative assessments, and interpreting portfolios (Fauzi & Mustika, 2022; Tsaniyah, 2024). Without systematic training, teachers tend to revert to traditional instruments that are easier but less precise. This competency gap also stems from the new curriculum, which emphasizes the integration of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, and is inconsistent across teachers and madrasahs.

Madrasah cultural aspects and resistance to change also slow the pace of assessment reform. In some MIs, assessment practices are long-standing and considered relatively safe, though not optimal. Moving toward more holistic affective assessment requires time, policy support, and clear evidence of benefits. Without the support of madrasah leaders, allocated hours for observation, and a system of rewards for quality assessment practices, individual teacher initiatives often stall or fail to scale (Zubair & Faslah, 2025).

Practical solutions worth considering include developing simple but measurable affective rubrics, engaging students in self-assessment and spiritual reflection, and using short portfolios as evidence of progress. Furthermore, utilizing simple technology (e.g., mobile-based observation recording apps) can ease administrative burdens and facilitate longitudinal documentation. However, implementing these solutions requires support in the form of structured training and technical guidance from supervisors or education offices to ensure consistency and quality. Policy-wise, interventions that combine training, workload redistribution, and the development of contextualized assessment instruments for madrasahs are needed. Training programs should be practical, including sample rubrics, observation exercises, and classroom mentoring, and should be followed by regular monitoring (Hammill et al., 2015). With adequate policy and institutional support, madrasahs are more likely to implement valid, reliable, and useful affective and spiritual assessments that support student character development in real-world settings.

Table 1. Challenges in Assessing Islamic Education (PAI) Learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

No	Challenge Aspects	Description
1	Affective	Difficult to measure because it requires long-term observation
2	Instrument	Less varied and not yet authentically based
3	Time	Limited time for teachers to carry out assessments
4	Teacher Competence	Lack of learning evaluation training

DISCUSSION

The study results show that the complexity of assessing Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*/PAI) learning in Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah/MI) stems from the need to assess three learning domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (Majid, 2017). Cognitive assessment tends to be easily operationalized through written tests and multiple-choice tests. At the same time, the affective (attitudes, values, religious motivation) and psychomotor (practical worship skills, worship rituals) dimensions require more complex observation, portfolio, and performance-based assessment methods (Bahsoan et al., 2025). This complexity demands varied instruments and a continuous assessment process, thus increasing teachers' workload if not supported by adequate mechanisms and resources.

From the perspective of PAI objectives, holistic assessment is essential, as religious education is not only the transmission of knowledge but also the formation of religious character and noble morals (Hardaker & Sabki, 2018). Assessments that rely solely on cognitive aspects risk neglecting students' moral and spiritual development, which is at the core of PAI's mission. Therefore, evaluations must be designed to capture behavioral changes, the internalization of values, and consistency in religious practices that reflect real learning outcomes beyond exam contexts.

Previous studies confirm that PAI assessment must encompass all competency dimensions to ensure academic and moral relevance (Sumarni, 2018). This multidimensional approach requires integrating formative and summative instruments, using clear rubrics to assess attitudes and skills, and employing data triangulation mechanisms (e.g., teacher observations, student reflections, and peer evaluations) to enhance assessment validity. Without triangulation, affective and psychomotor assessment results are susceptible to subjective bias.

When linked to prior studies, this problem is a recurring systemic issue: teachers in MI face difficulties consistently implementing authentic assessment (Asy'ari, 2024). This inconsistency occurs at various levels—from differences in rubric interpretation and observation frequency to differences in learning outcome documentation practices. As a result, affective and psychomotor assessments are often not systematically documented, thus not providing a strong basis for learning interventions or feedback to students and parents (Saadah et al., 2026).

The dominant preference for written tests also reflects an evaluation culture oriented toward quantitative results and simple administration. While written tests facilitate grading, an exclusive focus on them makes the affective and religious aspects of students' developmental profiles less visible (Wati, 2024). It distorts educational goals: students may achieve high academic scores but not demonstrate a consistent understanding of values or practice religious practices.

The gap in teacher competency in developing assessment instruments is a structural factor that exacerbates the problem. Many teachers are unfamiliar with designing valid and reliable affective and psychomotor assessment rubrics and implementing performance assessment techniques such as project assessment, criteria-based observation, or portfolios (Murtadlo, 2018). Without these competencies, efforts to transition to a holistic assessment model will be hampered, even if curriculum policy requires it. It also leads to a reliance on more practical but inadequate assessment formats.

A study by Hasbullah (2023) emphasized that sporadic, one-off teacher training is insufficient; ongoing training and field coaching/mentoring are needed to build practical capacity for developing and implementing authentic assessment instruments. Training should include rubric creation, systematic observation techniques, portfolio documentation, and assessment data analysis for remedial planning. Furthermore, providing examples of instruments contextualized to MI characteristics (child age, local culture, and Islamic Religious Education curriculum demands) will increase the adoption of more meaningful assessment practices.

From an administrative and policy perspective, madrasah institutions need to simplify assessment governance to reduce teacher burdens without sacrificing evaluation comprehensiveness. An ideal administrative system facilitates observation recording, simple digital portfolio integration, and adaptable rubric templates. Policy support from the school

and government levels—for example, allocated time for assessment observations, incentives for instrument development, and national standards for affective/psychomotor assessment—will strengthen practical implementation in the field (Anwar et al., 2025).

The challenges of Islamic Education (PAI) assessment in Islamic elementary schools are multifaceted: technical (instruments and methods), capacity (teacher competency), administrative (recording systems), and policy (institutional support). Practical recommendations emerging from this analysis include: developing ongoing training programs with field mentoring; providing contextual rubrics and examples of instruments; adopting streamlined, digital-based assessment administration systems where possible; and policy advocacy for the allocation of time and resources. Integrated interventions between training, administration, and policy are needed to ensure that Islamic Religious Education assessment in Islamic elementary schools truly reflects the holistic goal of religious education, producing students who are not only academically proficient but also morally and spiritually mature.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the assessment of Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*/PAI) learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) plays an important role in measuring the success of learning holistically—covering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects—but its implementation has not been optimal due to various challenges, including difficulties in assessing students' attitudes and spiritual dimensions, teachers' limited understanding of authentic assessment, lack of evaluation training, and complex administrative burdens; therefore, it is necessary to improve teacher competence through continuous training, development of more effective and simpler assessment instruments, and support from schools and educational policies so that the PAI evaluation system in MI can function more comprehensively and reflect the development of students as a whole.

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