Faith and Evaluation: Catholic Religious Education in a Plural Society

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Abstract: This study explores assessment practices in Catholic religious education across junior secondary schools in Indonesia, with the primary aim of understanding how teachers evaluate student learning in plural and culturally diverse contexts. Set against the backdrop of Indonesia's multicultural society, the research addresses the growing need for inclusive, value-based, and contextually adapted religious education. Employing a qualitative narrative phenomenological approach, the study draws upon semi-structured interviews with six Catholic religious education teachers from Western, Central, and Eastern Indonesia. Supplemented by curriculum documents and analysed using thematic analysis with ATLAS.ti, the research captures teachers' lived experiences and assessment strategies. The findings reveal that teachers employ a hybrid model of evaluation—combining written tests, projects, discussions, and reflections—that aligns with students' social realities and moral development. Assessment is used not only to measure knowledge, but also to reinforce ethical behaviour, religious tolerance, and community engagement. The study highlights the importance of parental involvement, technological integration, and context-responsive pedagogy in enhancing learning outcomes. The implications suggest that Catholic religious education can play a strategic role in promoting social cohesion and intercultural understanding in a plural society. This research contributes original insights by providing a regionally comparative and empirically grounded account of assessment in faith-based education, emphasising the role of teacher agency in navigating doctrinal integrity and multicultural sensitivity.

Keywords: Catholic education; Indonesia; interfaith learning; pluralism; religious assessment; teacher narrative.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi praktik asesmen dalam pendidikan agama Katolik di sekolah menengah pertama di Indonesia, dengan tujuan utama untuk memahami bagaimana guru mengevaluasi pembelajaran siswa dalam konteks masyarakat yang plural dan beragam secara budaya. Berlatar belakang masyarakat multikultural Indonesia, penelitian ini merespons kebutuhan akan pendidikan agama yang inklusif, berbasis nilai, dan adaptif secara kontekstual. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologis naratif, penelitian ini mengandalkan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan enam guru pendidikan agama Katolik dari wilayah Barat, Tengah, dan Timur Indonesia. Data ini dilengkapi dengan dokumen kurikulum dan dianalisis melalui analisis tematik menggunakan perangkat lunak ATLAS.ti, sehingga mampu menangkap pengalaman hidup guru serta strategi asesmen yang diterapkan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa para guru menerapkan model evaluasi hibrida—menggabungkan tes tertulis, proyek, diskusi, dan refleksi—yang selaras dengan realitas sosial siswa serta perkembangan moral mereka. Asesmen tidak hanya digunakan untuk mengukur pengetahuan, tetapi juga untuk memperkuat perilaku etis, toleransi beragama, dan keterlibatan sosial. Studi ini menyoroti pentingnya peran orang tua, integrasi teknologi, dan pedagogi yang responsif terhadap konteks dalam meningkatkan hasil pembelajaran. Implikasinya menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan agama Katolik memiliki peran strategis dalam mendorong kohesi sosial dan pemahaman lintas budaya di masyarakat plural. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi

orisinal dengan menyajikan analisis perbandingan regional yang berbasis empirik tentang asesmen dalam pendidikan berbasis agama, serta menekankan peran agen guru dalam menjaga integritas doktrinal dan kepekaan multikultural.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Katolik; Indonesia; pembelajaran lintas agama; pluralisme; penilaian agama; narasi guru.

1.   Introduction

Catholic religious education plays a crucial role in shaping students' identity, morals, and spirituality, particularly in Indonesia, which is renowned for its cultural and religious diversity. According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2023), there are 89 Christian Theology Junior Secondary Schools spread across the country, with student participation rates reaching 7.5% of the total students in faith-based schools. In addition to providing an understanding of religious doctrines and teachings, Catholic religious education also aims to instil universal values such as tolerance, respect for differences, and the ability to engage in interfaith dialogue. This aligns with the objectives of national education, as outlined in the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, which emphasises the importance of character development through religious education (Kemendikbud, 2003).

However, in practice, Catholic religious education faces various complex challenges. Research conducted by Stanislaus (2022) indicates that the primary challenges in Catholic religious education in Indonesia include a lack of in-depth understanding of theological concepts, limitations in innovative teaching methods, and insufficient interfaith dialogue within the curriculum. Furthermore, the diverse social contexts across Indonesia, including the Western, Central, and Eastern regions, necessitate different approaches to the delivery of Catholic religious education. A study by Van Eersel et al. (2010) revealed that in Eastern Indonesia, where the majority of the population adheres to Christianity and Catholicism, Catholic religious education is more widely accepted. Meanwhile, in the Western and Central regions, where the Muslim population is predominant, Catholic religious education often faces challenges in creating inclusive spaces for interfaith dialogue. Additionally, parental involvement in supporting religious learning at home is another major challenge. Mossière (2009) highlights that family support plays a crucial role in shaping students' religious understanding. Unfortunately, in the Indonesian context, many parents are less actively engaged in discussing spiritual and moral questions with their children, thereby reducing the effectiveness of religious education in schools.

These challenges must be viewed within the broader socio-religious dynamics of Southeast Asia, where pluralism and multicultural encounters are daily realities (Selway, 2015; Shaw, 2016). In Indonesia, the intersection of Catholic identity with predominantly Muslim, Hindu, and indigenous spiritual contexts creates unique pedagogical demands on religious educators. Catholic religious education thus operates not only as a space for doctrinal instruction, but also as a forum for interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural understanding (Orchard, 2023; Seiple & Hoover, 2021). This dual role aligns with contemporary peace education frameworks that integrate religious literacy and interreligious engagement to promote social inclusion and reduce prejudice (Masiga, 2023; McCowan, 2017). In this way, religious education becomes a microcosm of broader efforts to promote peaceful coexistence in a plural society.

In the context of learning evaluation, previous studies have underscored the significance of evaluation as a tool for improving the quality of education and ensuring the achievement of religious education objectives. Biggs (1999) emphasises that evaluation should not be limited to written examinations but should also encompass more diverse methods such as projects, observations, and performance assessments. A holistic evaluation approach can assess students' understanding more comprehensively, including their ability to relate theological concepts to real-life situations. Furthermore, Vermeer (2012) and Sultmann et al. (2022) highlight the importance of a contextual approach in religious education, where learning goes beyond teaching doctrines to exploring how these

teachings can be applied in daily life. Osewska (2015) also stresses the need for integrating theological concepts, interreligious dialogue, and strengthening students' identities within the Catholic religious education curriculum. However, despite numerous studies discussing evaluation in religious education, a significant gap remains in research that directly assesses students' knowledge and skills in Catholic religious education in Indonesia. Most existing research focuses more on curriculum evaluation or teachers' perceptions of religious education, while studies assessing student learning outcomes within diverse social and cultural contexts remain scarce. This gap in understanding how factors such as cultural diversity, socio-economic disparities, and educational policies influence student learning outcomes in Catholic religious education needs to be addressed.

This study aims to evaluate the practice of assessment in Catholic religious education in junior secondary schools across three regions of Indonesia: the Western, Central, and Eastern regions. The research focuses on understanding how teachers design and implement assessments to measure the achievement of learning objectives, as well as how these assessment results are utilised to enhance the quality of education. Additionally, this study seeks to identify the challenges and opportunities in implementing the Catholic religious education curriculum and to provide recommendations for improving learning effectiveness. Consequently, this research is expected to contribute significantly to the development of Catholic religious education in Indonesia, particularly in the context of learning assessment.

This study posits that the effectiveness of Catholic religious education is significantly enhanced when assessment practices are designed to be inclusive, contextual, and aligned with both students' lived experiences and educational goals. Drawing on Biggs' Constructive Alignment Theory (1999), the research assumes that when assessment methods—such as written tests, group discussions, projects, and observations—are constructively aligned with learning outcomes and instructional activities, students are more likely to achieve deeper cognitive and moral understanding of religious teachings. Furthermore, in accordance with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), learning is seen as a socially mediated process; thus, the active involvement of teachers in facilitating dialogue, guiding reflection, and scaffolding learning experiences is essential. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) underpins the hypothesis that external factors such as family support, school context, and wider community values shape the effectiveness of assessment and learning. The hypothesis, therefore, is that when teachers implement a holistic, multi-method assessment approach that is contextually adapted and socially supported, students not only acquire doctrinal knowledge but are also more capable of embodying and practising Catholic moral values in their daily lives. This integrated approach is expected to foster spiritual, ethical, and social development in a manner that is responsive to Indonesia's plural and diverse educational settings.

2. Methods

This study evaluates assessment practices in Catholic religious education in junior high schools across three regions of Indonesia—West, Central, and East. These regions are selected based on the diversity of cultural, social, and religious contexts that shape Catholic education. Urban and modern educational trends often influence Western Indonesia, while Eastern Indonesia integrates more traditional and local cultural values. By analysing these different contexts, the study explores how Catholic religious education is implemented, the challenges teachers face, and potential opportunities for improving learning through effective assessment strategies. The selection of schools and teachers also considered the religious composition of the surrounding community to ensure that perspectives from plural and mono-religious contexts were adequately represented. This approach enabled the study to explore how Catholic religious education adapts within both majority-Christian and predominantly-Muslim regions.

This research employs a qualitative approach with a narrative phenomenological design (Bowen, 2009; Jhon W. Creswell, 2014). This methodology is chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences in conducting assessments, emphasising both their technical approaches and personal reflections. The phenomenological aspect focuses on how teachers perceive and

experience evaluation, while the narrative element provides a platform for them to articulate their challenges and strategies in their own words. This approach ensures a holistic and contextual understanding of assessment practices in Catholic religious education (Patton, 2014).

The study utilises both primary and secondary data sources (John W Creswell & Poth, 2016). Primary data consists of semi-structured interviews with six Catholic religious teachers from the selected regions, chosen through purposive sampling to represent diverse backgrounds, teaching experiences, and geographical locations. The sample includes three female and three male teachers, with experience ranging from 5 to 30 years. Their academic background in Catholic religious studies (Bachelor of Religion - S.Ag) ensures that they possess relevant expertise. Secondary data, including curriculum documents, lesson plans, and educational reports, is used to complement and validate findings from the interviews.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured telephone interviews, guided by a set of structured yet flexible questions that allowed participants to elaborate on their perspectives. The questions focused on assessment methods, challenges in evaluation, and strategies to enhance student learning outcomes. The open-ended nature of the interviews encouraged teachers to provide rich, contextual insights. Additionally, curriculum documents and teaching records were analyzed to validate and supplement the interview data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Triangulation was applied by comparing interview responses with documentary evidence to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

Data analysis was carried out using ATLAS.ti 7 (Friese, 2019), following the thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The process involved (1) transcribing and organizing data, (2) coding key themes, (3) categorising findings into broader thematic groups, (4) analyzing relationships between themes, and (5) synthesizing results into a structured narrative. To ensure validity and reliability, cross-referencing interview data with secondary sources applied triangulation techniques, and member checking was conducted to confirm the accuracy of findings with participants (Bryman, 2016). This methodological approach ensures a systematic and rigorous evaluation of Catholic religious education assessment practices while maintaining the richness of qualitative insights from experienced educators (Matthew B. Miles & Huberman, 2013).

3.   Results

In line with the study's objectives to evaluate assessment practices, understand teachers' strategies, identify contextual challenges, and provide practical recommendations, the following findings present a thematic overview of Catholic religious education in three culturally diverse regions of Indonesia. In this section, the researcher explores and discusses the research with reference to the responses given by the interviewed individuals. In Figure 1 of the coding results and coding results, 129 encodings are found in 5 categories (Saldaña, 2021).
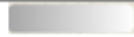
Name	Based on	Density	Author	Created	Modified	Family
Assessment methods		3	0	Super	14/11/2023 09.14:22	14/11/2023 09.14:22	
Basic concepts of religious education		3	0	Super	14/11/2023 08.42:22	14/11/2023 08.42:22	
Learning experience		4	0	Super	14/11/2023 08.50:30	14/11/2023 08.50:30	
Parental roles and support		6	0	Super	14/11/2023 09.33:51	14/11/2023 09.33:51	
Student participation and motivation		4	0	Super	14/11/2023 11.33:15	14/11/2023 11.33:15	
Definition of Religious Education Learning		4	0	Super	14/11/2023 08.29:34	14/11/2023 08.29:34	

Figure 1. 5 Category

Assessment Methods

Catholic religious education focuses not only on the transfer of knowledge but also on the development of students' understanding and spiritual values. To achieve this goal, Catholic religious teachers in Indonesia apply various assessment methods that are tailored to their needs and context (Mirascieva, Petrovski, & Gjorgjeva, 2011). The following are the results of interviews with three Catholic religion teachers that provide an overview of the assessment methods they use, complete with direct observation in the classroom environment.

"I use the written exam as the main instrument but also integrate practical projects and group discussions. This method helps students develop a comprehensive understanding of religious material." Teacher 1 (Code 3-0)

"Due to difficult geographical conditions, I emphasised manual projects such as writing essays and presentations directly in class. I ensure equal access for all students and recognise environmental challenges." Teacher 2 (Code 4-0, Papua)

"I combine written exams with practical projects, group discussions, and online platforms. This approach creates a holistic and diverse assessment experience." Teacher 3 (Code 6-0)

The findings indicate that two out of three teachers combined traditional written examinations with practical or project-based assessments, suggesting a clear preference for hybrid evaluation models. This approach reflects an understanding that effective religious education requires assessing students' theoretical knowledge and their ability to internalise and apply spiritual and moral values in real-life contexts. Teachers aim to foster deeper engagement and holistic development by integrating cognitive and experiential dimensions. Such hybrid methods are particularly relevant in Catholic religious education, where character formation and lived faith experiences are as important as doctrinal comprehension.

The following are the results of interviews with Catholic religious teachers, presented visually through Figure 2.
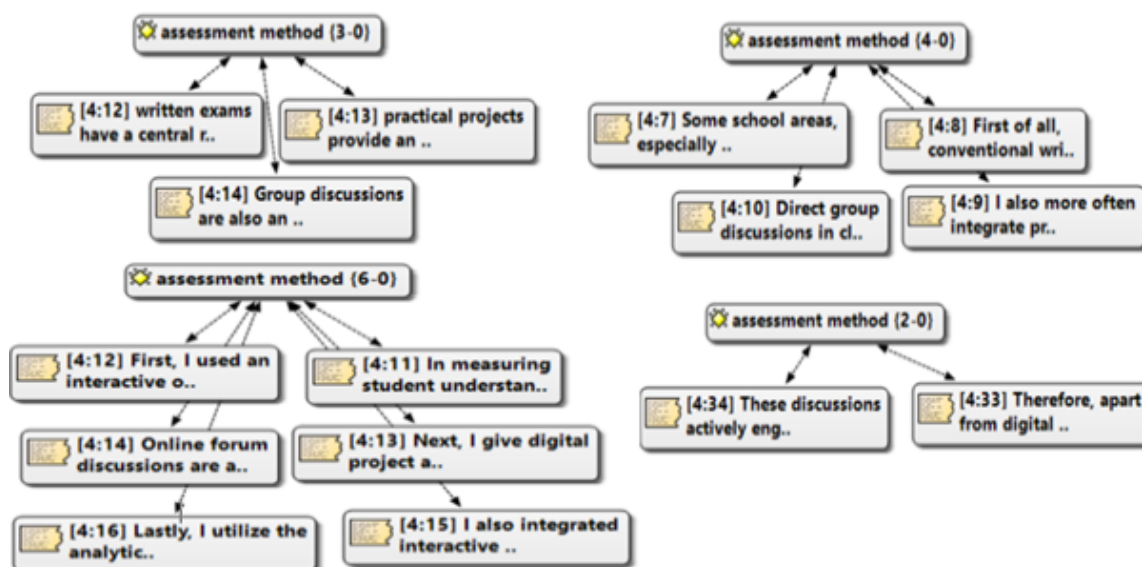
Figure 2. Assessment method

The results of the interviews with the religion teacher are presented visually in Figure 2, providing a clear and structured picture of the patterns and relationships between the variables identified in the study. Figure 2 shows how each teacher adjusts their assessment method based on the needs of the students and the contextual challenges they face.

Based on the results of interviews and data visualization, the assessment method in Catholic religious education is dynamic and adaptive to the context. Teachers use a variety of approaches, ranging from traditional to modern methods, to ensure that assessment measures not only knowledge but also students' skills and attitudes. The patterns seen from the data show that assessment methods are greatly influenced by geographical, social, and resource availability. In areas with limited access, such as Papua, teachers rely more on manual methods such as essays and direct presentations. Meanwhile, in areas with better access to technology, teachers can combine traditional methods with digital platforms. This pattern reflects the effectiveness of religious learning in certain social contexts. In remote areas, manual methods help students develop writing and critical thinking skills, while in urban areas, digital technology allows students to access more diverse and interactive learning materials.

These findings have important implications for religious education policy and the role of teachers in improving Catholic religious learning. First, the flexibility in assessment methods shows that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Teachers need to be provided with training and support to develop adaptive and inclusive assessment methods. Training in the use of technology for teachers in remote areas can help them integrate digital methods into assessments. Second, the use of technology in assessment, such as that conducted by Teacher 3, shows great potential to improve access and quality of learning, especially in remote areas. However, it also requires investment in infrastructure and teacher training (Tang et al., 2021). Third, these findings emphasise the importance of considering local contexts in designing curriculum and assessment methods so that religious education can be more relevant and effective for students. Education policies should encourage a flexible and student-centred approach, taking into account the social, cultural, and geographical diversity in Indonesia. These findings directly support the study's goal to evaluate how assessment practices are adapted to diverse regional contexts and resource availability.

Basic Concepts of Religious Education

In Catholic religious education, evaluation focuses not only on the transfer of knowledge but also on the formation of students' character and moral and spiritual values. The following are the results of

interviews with four Catholic religious teachers who gave their views on the basic concepts of religious education.

"The evaluation of religious learning is not only about knowledge but also about how students apply religious values in daily life. I assess the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects to understand the student's understanding holistically." Teacher 1 (Code 2-0)

"I teach students to apply religious values in their daily relationships with others. The context, values, and moral messages in Catholic religious learning are very important to shape students' character and ethics." Teacher 2 (Code 3-0)

"Tolerance and respect for diversity of beliefs are important values taught. Students are taught to respect differences and build harmony in a diverse society." Teacher 3 (Code 3-0)

"Religious learning includes understanding the concept of God, the holy book, worship, and rituals. Tolerance and respect for diversity of beliefs are key elements in religious learning." Teacher 4 (Code 4-0)

The following are the results of interviews with Catholic religious teachers, presented visually through Figure 3.
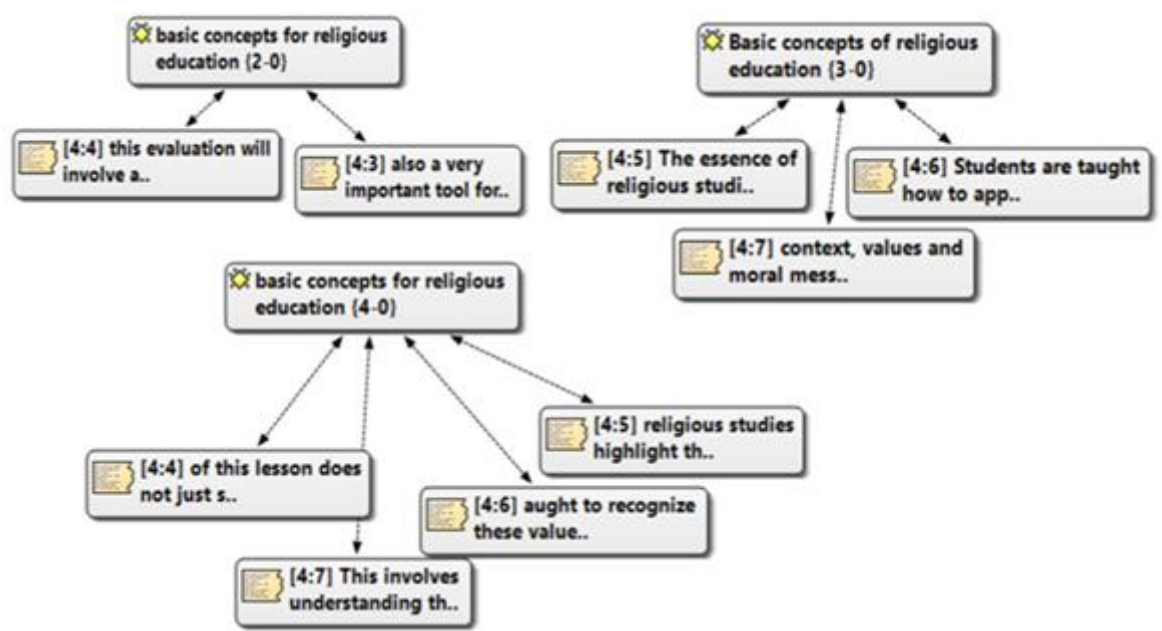

Figure 3. Basic concepts of religious education

The results of interviews with religious teachers are presented visually in Figure 3, providing an overview of the basic concepts of Catholic religious education and how these values are integrated into learning. Based on the results of interviews with Catholic religious teachers, four main concepts that are the focus of Catholic religious education can be identified (Varas, Santana, Nussbaum, Claro, & Imbarack, 2023). These concepts reflect a holistic approach that focuses on the doctrinal aspects and the formation of students' character and social values. Table 1 summarises the percentages and descriptions of each concept and the implications associated with religious education practices.

Table 1. Focus on Catholic Religious Education Based on Teachers' Perspectives

Basic Concepts	Percentage	Description	Emphasising Teachers	Implication
Integration of Religious	30%	Emphasising the application of	Teachers 1, Teachers 2	Religious education should be relevant to students' life

Values in Daily Life		religious values in the context of personal and daily practice.		experiences and encourage their application of religious values in real action.
Social and Ethical Dimensions	25%	Focus on social relations and the formation of ethics based on religious values.	Teachers 2	Building the character of students who are able to interact positively in society.
Tolerance and Diversity	25%	Emphasising the importance of respecting differences in beliefs and building interfaith harmony.	Teachers 3	Religious education should be a tool to promote tolerance and harmony in a multicultural society.
Understanding the Basic Concepts of Religion	20%	Focus on understanding basic religious doctrines, such as God's concepts, scripture, worship, and rituals.	Teachers 4	Ensuring students have a strong foundation of knowledge about religious teachings.

Table 1 shows that Catholic religious education not only focuses on doctrinal aspects (20%) but also emphasises the integration of religious values into daily life (30%), social and ethical dimensions (25%), and tolerance and diversity (25%). This pattern reflects a holistic approach to Catholic religious education, where students are not only taught about doctrine but also how to apply those values in real life.

These findings have important implications for the practice of Catholic religious education. First, the emphasis on the application of religious values in daily life shows that religious education must be contextual and relevant to the student's experience. This is in line with the research of Vermeer (Vermeer, 2012), which emphasises the importance of a contextual approach in religious education. Second, the focus on the social dimension and tolerance reflects the need to build harmony in a multicultural society, as explained. Third, the emphasis on understanding the basic concepts of religion suggests that religious education must still maintain its doctrinal foundations while integrating universal values such as tolerance and social justice. However, challenges remain in the implementation of these concepts. In areas with high religious diversity, teachers may face difficulties in teaching the values of tolerance without causing conflict. In addition, the lack of teacher training in a contextual approach can hinder the effectiveness of learning. Therefore, an education policy that supports teacher training and inclusive curriculum development is needed (Osewska, 2015). This insight contributes to understanding how teachers conceptualise and deliver Catholic religious education in ways that address both doctrinal integrity and multicultural realities.

The emphasis on tolerance and respect for diversity suggests that Catholic religious education in Indonesia is not merely concerned with doctrinal transmission but serves as a site for cultural negotiation and the promotion of peaceful coexistence. Teachers in Muslim-majority areas, for instance, often adapt their language and examples to foster mutual respect and avoid sectarian tension. These adjustments demonstrate a pragmatic approach to religious education in multicultural societies, positioning teachers as key actors in maintaining social harmony.

Learning Experiences

Learning experiences in religious education play a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of spiritual, moral, and social values. The approach used by teachers reflects an effort to create meaningful and applicative learning experiences, as revealed in the following interviews and live observations.

"We focus on hands-on experiences, such as hygiene campaign projects based on religious values. This activity not only helps students understand the importance of protecting the environment but also instils deep moral values. "Post-project reflection is very important. Upon completion, students are invited to evaluate their experiences and how religious values influence their views on social and moral responsibility." Teacher 1 (Code 4-0)

"I use technology and simulations to help students understand the dilemmas of modern ethics. Through virtual case studies, students are invited to explore how religious values can be applied in real situations. "This approach allows students to understand religious values in a way that is relevant to the challenges of the times. Technology helps provide a more interactive and engaging learning experience." Teacher 2 (Code 2-0)

"I emphasise personal experience, religious practice, and profound spiritual experience. Students are encouraged to explore religious meanings through projects that involve the community. I involve students in community activities, such as helping the surrounding community. Through reflection, students understand how their actions reflect religious values." Teacher 3 (Code 4-0)

The following are the results of interviews with Catholic religious teachers, presented visually through Figure 4.
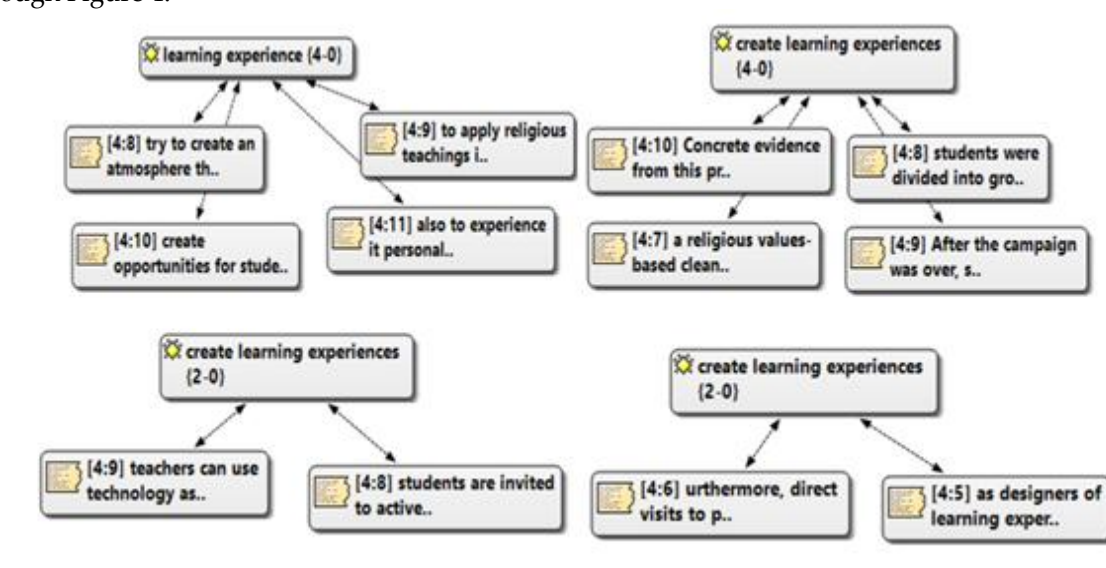

Figure 04. Learning Experiences

The results of the interviews and observations are presented visually through Figure 4, which illustrates the three main approaches in the learning experience used by Catholic religion teachers. This figure shows the percentages and descriptions of each approach, as well as their relation to the values taught.

These data show that the learning experience in Catholic religious education is greatly influenced by the local context and the availability of resources. Teacher 1 uses hands-on projects due to limited access to technology, while Teacher 2 leverages technology to create interactive learning experiences. These findings have important implications for the practice of religious education. First, the hands-on project approach (Teacher 1) shows that practical activities combined with reflection can help students understand Catholic religious values in depth. Second, the use of technology and simulation (Teacher 2) reflects the need to integrate modern methods in religious education, especially in the face of the challenges of the times. Third, community involvement (Teacher 3) emphasises the importance of

connecting religious learning with real life, as explained by Paris (2015). However, challenges remain in the implementation of this approach. In areas with limited access to technology, teachers may have difficulty applying simulation methods. In addition, the lack of teacher training in designing community-based projects can hinder the effectiveness of learning. Therefore, an education policy that supports teacher training and inclusive curriculum development is needed, as suggested by Nabiela & Ulfatin (2023). This aligns with the study's aim to identify strategies that enhance student engagement through contextually relevant and reflective learning practices.

Parental Role and Support

The role of parents in supporting children's religious learning is an important element in creating an effective learning experience. Interviews with teachers and live observations show variations in the way schools and parents collaborate, as well as the challenges faced in implementing them.

"Collaboration creates a strong sense of belonging on the part of parents towards their children's school life. I understand that many parents face challenges, such as busy schedules, so it is difficult to always support their children's religious activities directly." Teacher 1 (Code 4-0)

"Formal discussions with parents allow us to design relevant and meaningful religious activities for students. We often invite parents to participate in school activities, such as joint prayers or discussions about religious values, which helps create a stronger relationship between the family and the school." Teacher 2 (Code 5-0)

"Experiences such as prayer together at home and family discussions play an important role in shaping children's religious values. Children who see their parents actively involved in religious activities at home tend to have a deeper understanding of religion." Teacher 3 (Code 6-0)

The following are the results of interviews with Catholic religious teachers, presented visually through Figure 5.
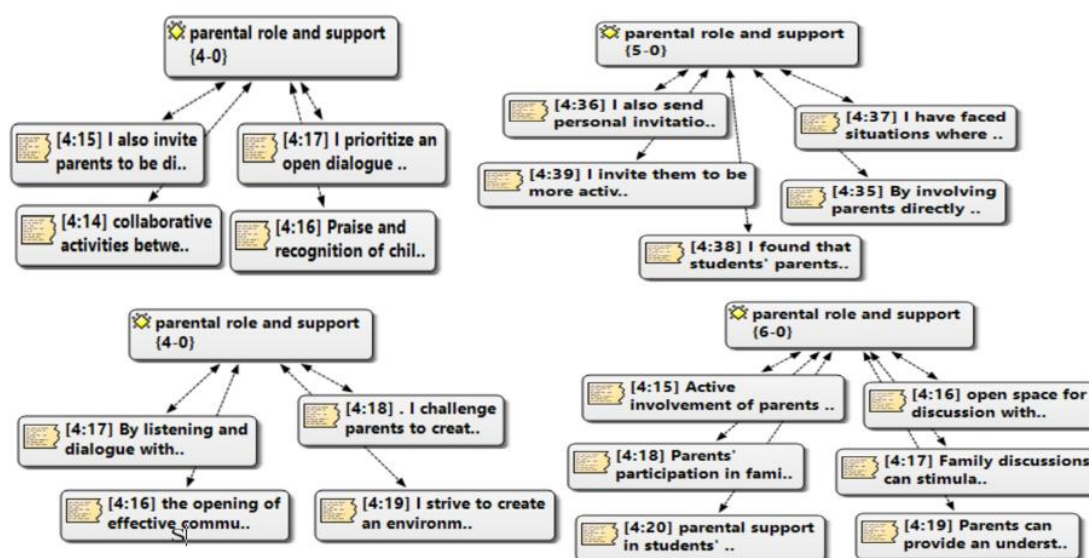

Figure 5. Parental Role and Support

The results of the interviews and observations are presented visually in Figure 5, which illustrates the three main approaches in collaboration between schools and parents. This figure shows the percentages and descriptions of each approach, as well as their relevance to the effectiveness of religious learning.

This data shows that collaboration between schools and parents is greatly influenced by social context and time availability. In urban areas with busy parents, a flexible approach is more commonly used, while in rural areas, direct parental involvement is more common. These findings have important

implications for the practice of religious education. First, flexible collaboration (Teacher 1) shows that schools need to adapt their approach to parents' time and resource constraints. This is in line with research Morales, Canoy, Escobia, & Montebon (2022), which emphasises the importance of flexibility in involving parents. Second, formal cooperation (Teacher 2) reflects the need to build strong relationships between schools and families (Goforth & Pham, 2023). Third, personal experiences at home (Teacher 3) emphasised the importance of connecting religious learning with students' daily lives, as explained (Mansir, 2022).

However, challenges remain in the implementation of this approach. In areas with low levels of parent participation, schools may struggle to build effective collaborations. Additionally, a lack of parental understanding of the importance of religious education can hinder their involvement. Therefore, an education policy that supports parent training and inclusive program development (Biktagirova & Khitruk, 2018).

Student Participation and Motivation

Active participation of students in religious learning and student motivation are important elements in creating meaningful learning experiences. Based on interviews with teachers and direct observations, various approaches have been taken to increase student engagement and motivation, with a focus on student initiative, positive support, and managing the impact of social interactions.

"Students who show initiative to learn more about religious values usually have a stronger understanding. We provide a space for students to be creative and develop religious values through projects that involve communities or families." Teacher 1 (Code 4-0)

"I create creative projects that involve art or media to keep students motivated. Open discussions with students help us figure out what's holding them back so we can offer relevant solutions." Teacher 2 (Code 3-0)

"Unhealthy social interaction can lead to a decrease in students' motivation in learning religion. I create an inclusive environment and provide extra support to help students cope with stress due to negative social relationships." Teacher 3 (Code 6-0)

"I see that students who are actively involved in group discussions and activities usually have a better understanding. I try to identify the needs of each student to make sure they can engage in a way that suits their abilities and interests." Teacher 4 (Code 1-0)

The following are the results of interviews with Catholic religious teachers, presented visually through Figure 6.
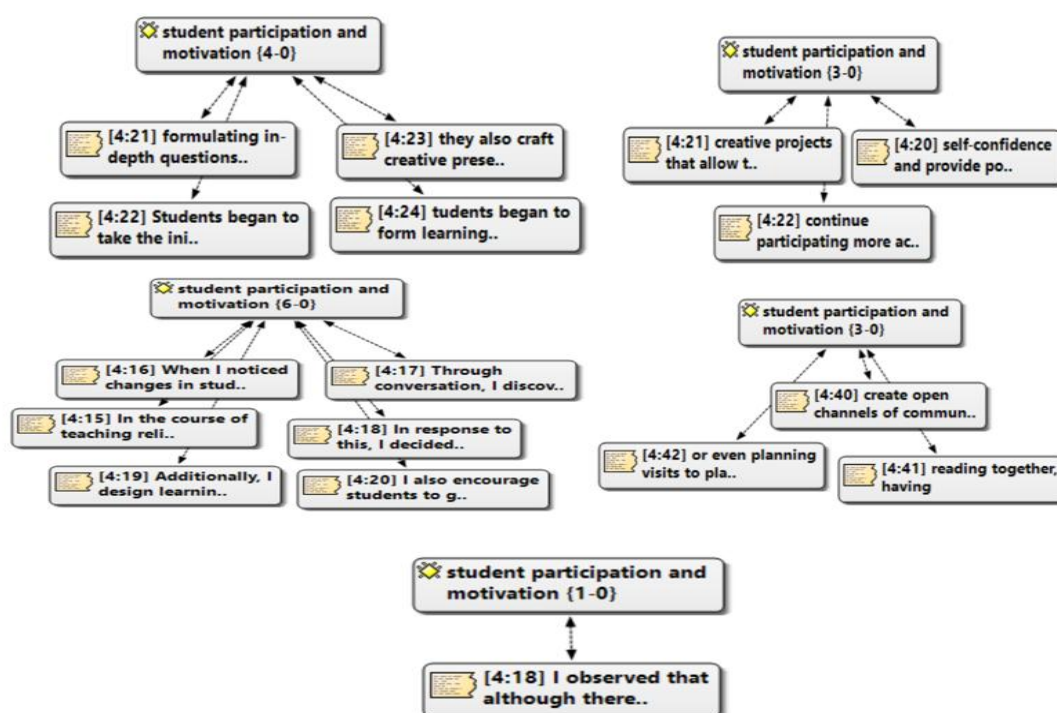
Figure 6. Student Participation and Motivation

The results of the interviews and observations are presented visually through Figure 6, which illustrates four main approaches to increasing student participation and motivation. This figure shows the percentages and descriptions of each approach, as well as their relevance to the effectiveness of religious learning (Gronlund, 1985).

These data suggest that diverse approaches are needed to increase student participation and motivation, depending on the social context and individual needs. These findings have important implications for the practice of religious education. First, a student-initiative-based approach (Teacher 1) shows that providing space for students to explore religious values independently can increase their understanding and engagement. This is in line with Casson's (2019) research, which emphasises the importance of having space for students to explore religious values independently. Second, the creative project (Teacher 2) reflects the need to make religious learning more engaging and relevant for students, as explained by Yuliharti (2022). Third, an inclusive environment (Teacher 3) emphasises the importance of creating a safe and supportive learning atmosphere, especially in facing social challenges such as bullying. Fourth, the individualised approach (Teacher 4) shows that teachers need to understand the needs of each student to ensure optimal engagement.

However, challenges remain in the implementation of this approach. For example, in a school with limited resources, teachers may struggle to provide creative projects or individualised approaches. In addition, the lack of teacher training in managing negative social interactions can hinder the effectiveness of learning. From this problem, an education policy that supports teacher training and inclusive program development is needed (Nabiela & Ulfatin, 2023). These findings are crucial in addressing how student-centred methods and inclusive strategies contribute to the success of religious education, as aimed by this research.

Understanding Learning Evaluation

Evaluation in the context of religious learning is an important element, with the main focus on measuring the success and effectiveness of the learning process. Based on interviews with Catholic religious teachers, the evaluation is used to ensure that learning is in accordance with curriculum

standards and that students are able to meet the needs and diversity of students. The evaluation approach used by Catholic religious teachers has a varied focus and strategy, reflecting the uniqueness of their perspective on the evaluation of religious learning.

"I evaluate how far the learning objectives are achieved and consider the learning context. With this approach, I can understand the extent to which learning impacts students, both academically and morally." Teacher 1 (Code 4-0)

"I assess whether the teaching methods used are effective in improving student understanding and engagement. This evaluation helps us understand how students respond to the material as a whole." Teacher 2 (Code 3-0)

"We analyzed how classroom interactions can affect learning success. The role of teachers is very important, both in creating a supportive learning environment and in providing creativity in delivering material." Teacher 3 (Code 2-0)

The following are the results of interviews with Catholic religious teachers, presented visually through Figure 7.
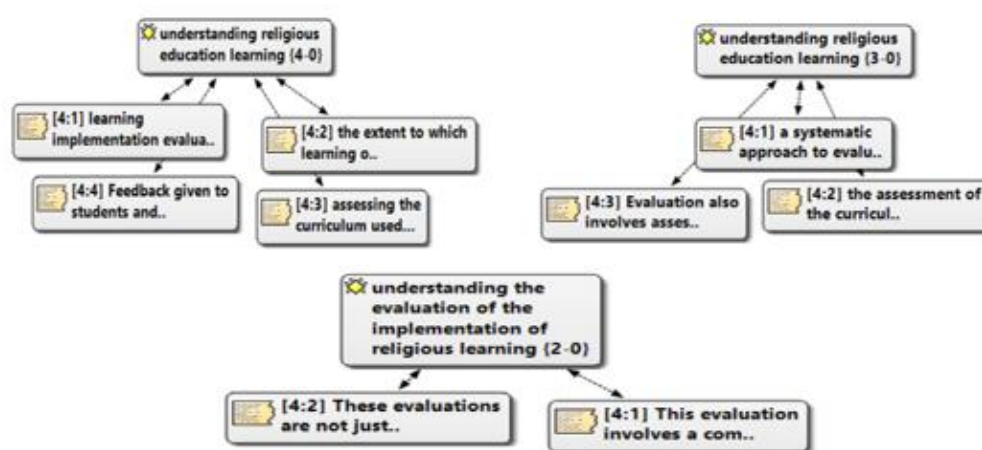

Figure 7. Understanding Learning Evaluation

The implications of these findings are the need for curriculum adjustments to better support a holistic and systematic approach to evaluation, as well as training for teachers to develop more effective evaluation skills. This section reinforces the study's focus on improving the quality and relevance of assessment practices in Catholic religious education through better evaluation design.

4. Discussion

Based on the findings, this study reveals that assessment practices in Catholic religious education across the Western, Central, and Eastern regions of Indonesia are highly contextual and adaptive, reflecting the diverse social, geographical, and cultural settings. Teachers employ a combination of traditional written assessments and project-based methods to support holistic learning that encompasses cognitive, affective, and spiritual domains. The results indicate that Catholic religious education extends beyond doctrinal teaching, emphasising the integration of moral values, tolerance, and lived religious experiences. Parental involvement, reflective learning experiences, and students' motivation and participation are key contributors to effective learning. Furthermore, evaluation practices are not solely used to measure academic achievement, but also to ensure the relevance of religious content to students' real-life contexts.

To reinforce this explanation with theoretical grounding, the findings can be linked to Biggs' Constructive Alignment Theory (1999), which emphasises that effective learning occurs when teaching activities, assessment tasks, and learning outcomes are aligned. In the context of this study, the use of varied and contextual assessment methods ensures that what is taught and assessed is meaningfully

connected to what students are expected to learn and internalise. Furthermore, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) supports the idea that learning is deeply influenced by social interaction and cultural context. The involvement of teachers, families, and community practices—as seen in the study—provides the scaffolding necessary for students to construct religious understanding through real-life experiences. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) underpins the interconnection between school, home, and broader cultural environments in shaping educational outcomes. These theoretical frameworks collectively affirm that inclusive, context-aware assessment practices are not only pedagogically sound but essential for the development of students' religious identity and moral competence in a plural society.

These findings resonate with and extend prior research on contextual and holistic approaches in religious education assessment. For instance, Parhan et al. (2024) demonstrated that a contextual learning model in Islamic education, particularly when focusing on practical applications like prayer, significantly improved both understanding and implementation of religious values. This aligns with the current study's evidence of hybrid assessment methods—such as written tests, group discussions, and community projects—being effective across diverse Indonesian regions. Filipović (Filipović, 2019) further observed that socio-cultural factors profoundly shape how religious knowledge is mediated, which supports this study's emphasis on regionally adapted pedagogical strategies. Similarly, Thanissaro (2012) highlighted that students' attitudes towards religious education improve when assessments align with their home faith backgrounds and involve participatory learning, a notion echoed in this study's emphasis on parental involvement and real-life reflections. From a holistic standpoint, Maguire and Miller (2024) argued that theological education must integrate spiritual formation with academic development, a concept also reflected in the Indonesian context where Catholic educators assess moral growth alongside doctrinal knowledge. Moreover, this study's emphasis on individualised, reflective, and value-laden learning experiences complements findings by Watts (2008) and Chaudhary et al. (2019), who argue that education should address the "whole person," including spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions. A distinguishing feature of this study, however, lies in its comparative regional perspective within a pluralistic national context—bringing together voices from Western, Central, and Eastern Indonesia to illustrate how differing local geographies, religions, and cultures shape assessment practices. This regional depth and the inclusion of teacher narratives make a novel contribution to existing literature, revealing how Catholic religious education adapts dynamically to both global educational principles and deeply localised needs.

The findings of this study suggest that Catholic religious education in Indonesia transcends mere knowledge transmission by prioritising the cultivation of students' moral and spiritual values. This broader educational aim requires teachers to adopt flexible and adaptive strategies, assessing not only academic achievement but also students' character development and ethical growth. However, the study also uncovers persistent challenges, such as limited teacher capacity in project-based learning, underdeveloped critical thinking skills among students, and insufficient integration of technology—factors that constrain the realisation of a truly holistic educational approach. These findings reinforce earlier research by Ene and Barna (2015) and Thijssen, Rege, and Solheim (2022), who argue for the centrality of holistic assessment in religious education, and echo Roszak and Kudła's (2023) emphasis on moral education as a core dimension of religious learning. Furthermore, the study affirms Manea's (2014) assertion that the effectiveness of religious instruction is heavily reliant on teachers' pedagogical skills and personal engagement. Uniquely, this research contributes a regionally grounded analysis by examining Catholic education across Indonesia's diverse cultural and geographic contexts, highlighting both the promise and the limits of current practices. In doing so, it brings to light the strategic role of Indonesia's national curriculum—*PAK Kurtilas*—not only in promoting multiculturalism and religious moderation (Adon, 2021), but also in advancing gender equality and culturally responsive pedagogy (Truna, Viktorahadi, & Haq, 2022). Thus, the study offers critical insight into how religious education can serve as a platform for moral formation and social inclusion, while also revealing the structural and contextual adjustments needed to sustain its holistic intent.

The findings of this study carry significant social, historical, and ideological implications, particularly within the context of Indonesia's plural and multicultural society. Socially, Catholic religious education, when implemented through inclusive and contextual assessment, can function as a transformative medium for promoting empathy, tolerance, and civic values among students—thereby supporting broader goals of social cohesion (Francis, ap Siôn, McKenna, & Penny, 2017; Rissanen & Sai, 2018). This reflects similar patterns observed in European and Scandinavian contexts, where religious education that engages with diversity and student backgrounds contributes positively to intergroup understanding (Andreassen, 2019; Danner & Akpinar, 2024). Historically, the shift in Indonesian Catholic education from doctrinal instruction to value-based learning mirrors global educational reforms aimed at integrating character formation and critical thinking into religious curricula (Roszak & Kudła, 2023). Ideologically, this transformation challenges the rigidity of traditional religious instruction and repositions religious education as a dialogical process that interacts meaningfully with students' lived realities. Such a model resonates with Nelson et al.'s (2025) advocacy for shared religious education that fosters intercultural competence amidst increasing societal diversity. Furthermore, the study contributes to a broader understanding of curriculum contextualisation, echoing calls for multicultural and localised educational frameworks tailored to the sociocultural particularities of each region (Mariyono, 2024; G. Wang & Gao, 2023). In this way, religious education becomes not only a means of transmitting theological literacy but also a strategic site for cultivating inclusive citizenship, social trust, and resilience in the face of contemporary global challenges.

The implications of this study reflect both promising advances and critical limitations in the practice of Catholic religious education in Indonesia. On the positive side, the use of adaptive, holistic assessment strategies—ranging from project-based activities to reflective discussions—has the potential to enhance student engagement, deepen moral formation, and promote religious values that align with the nation's multicultural ethos. These practices support the development of empathy, tolerance, and inclusive citizenship, echoing earlier studies that demonstrate the role of religious education in fostering social cohesion (Francis et al., 2017; Rissanen & Sai, 2018). However, several dysfunctions also emerge. First, teacher competence remains a significant barrier: many educators lack sufficient training in contextual and holistic pedagogies, particularly in areas such as self-regulated learning, emotional literacy, and digital integration (Karlen, Hertel, & Hirt, 2020; Q. Wang, Rahman, Yahya, Zhang, & Wang, 2024). Second, the persistent urban-rural digital divide severely restricts the equitable implementation of technology-based assessments, disadvantaging rural students and limiting their access to meaningful learning experiences (Li, 2025; Salemink, Strijker, & Bosworth, 2017). Third, parental involvement—while critical—is often uneven, particularly in lower socio-economic or geographically isolated communities, where parents may lack the resources or religious literacy to support their children's education (Bunnell, Yocum, Koyzis, & Strohmyer, 2018; Pusztai et al., 2024). These gaps reinforce structural inequalities and risk undermining the transformative promise of religious education. Therefore, while this study confirms the value of holistic and localised approaches, it also underscores the urgent need for targeted teacher development, infrastructure investment, and inclusive family engagement strategies to ensure that such practices are sustainable and equitably applied.

Based on the findings and identified challenges, several concrete policy actions are necessary to optimise the implementation of holistic and contextual assessment in Catholic religious education across Indonesia. First, capacity-building programmes for teachers should be prioritised at both national and regional levels, with emphasis on project-based learning, critical thinking facilitation, emotional intelligence, and digital pedagogies—especially for educators in under-resourced or rural schools. Second, equitable technological infrastructure must be developed to bridge the urban-rural digital divide, ensuring that all students have access to digital tools and reliable internet connectivity for reflective and experiential learning. Third, parental involvement strategies should be institutionalised through school-community partnerships, parent education programmes, and flexible communication channels that accommodate socio-cultural differences and varying levels of religious literacy. Additionally, curriculum contextualisation policies should empower local education

authorities to adapt national curricula to regional cultures and faith traditions while still aligning with broader goals of pluralism and inclusivity. These measures require integrated collaboration between the Ministry of Religious Affairs, diocesan education offices, teacher training institutes, and local communities to ensure sustained, inclusive, and transformative religious education across the archipelago.

5.   Conclusion

This study reveals that assessment practices in Catholic religious education at the junior secondary level in Indonesia are highly contextual, adaptive, and holistic—responding to the diverse social, geographical, and cultural landscapes of the Western, Central, and Eastern regions. The central insight drawn from this research is that the effectiveness of Catholic religious education is not solely dependent on the transmission of doctrinal knowledge, but rather on the meaningful integration of assessment strategies that align with students' lived realities, moral development, and spiritual growth. Teachers' ability to design reflective, multi-method evaluations; the active involvement of families; and the cultivation of student motivation through inclusive and experiential learning all emerge as crucial pillars of impactful religious education. Importantly, the study underscores that when assessment is used not merely to measure academic achievement, but to reinforce ethical values and real-life application, Catholic religious education becomes a vital vehicle for character formation and social cohesion. These findings contribute significantly to the scholarly discourse by affirming the necessity of context-sensitive, value-based educational approaches within pluralistic and multicultural societies.

This study contributes to the field of religious education by offering a contextually grounded and empirically rich analysis of assessment practices in Catholic religious education across Indonesia's diverse regions. It introduces a novel regional-comparative perspective highlighting how socio-cultural and geographical variables shape pedagogical strategies and evaluation methods. The research foregrounds teacher voices and lived experiences by employing a narrative-phenomenological approach, thus enriching existing frameworks with qualitative depth often lacking in large-scale policy evaluations. Furthermore, the study integrates theoretical models—such as Constructive Alignment, Sociocultural Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory—into a cohesive analytical lens that connects assessment practices with broader social and spiritual outcomes. It also proposes an interdisciplinary linkage between religious education, digital inclusion, and character formation, offering new questions for future inquiry regarding the sustainability of holistic learning in plural societies. As such, this research advances both the conceptual and practical understanding of how faith-based education can adapt responsively and inclusively to complex, multicultural contexts.

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges several limitations that may affect the generalisability and depth of its findings. The research was limited to a small sample of teachers from selected junior secondary schools, which may not fully capture the diversity of assessment practices across all Catholic educational institutions in Indonesia. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through interviews, without direct classroom observation across multiple timeframes, may introduce subjective bias and restrict the ability to assess long-term impacts of assessment strategies. The study also did not include perspectives from students or parents, which could have enriched the understanding of assessment effectiveness from a multi-stakeholder viewpoint. Future research is recommended to adopt mixed-method approaches, incorporate longitudinal data, and expand participant representation to include broader geographical areas and demographic groups. Such efforts will enable a more comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the dynamic interplay between religious pedagogy, contextual adaptation, and educational equity.

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