



Nature-Based Assessment in Islamic Religious Education: Tests, Non-Tests, and Authentic Approaches

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Abstract: Assessment in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in assessing students' learning outcomes comprehensively, encompassing the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. However, practice is still dominated by conventional testing models that emphasize knowledge, while under-emphasizing the spiritual and moral dimensions. This study aims to analyze assessment models in PAI—test, non-test, and authentic—and to review their relevance to the concept of fitrah-based education. This study uses a qualitative approach through a literature review of various theories and previous research findings. The results indicate that the test model is effective in measuring cognitive abilities, the non-test model assesses religious attitudes and character, while the authentic model is the most comprehensive form of assessment because it assesses the integration of knowledge, attitudes, and skills in a real-world context. From the perspective of fitrah-based education, these three models need to be integrated to assess human potential as a whole: intellect, heart, and deeds. Fitrah-based assessment requires teachers to not only measure learning outcomes but also guide students to develop according to their fitrah as beings who know, love, and serve Allah SWT. Thus, integrating the three assessment models is a strategic step toward realizing a holistic, humanistic, and spiritual PAI evaluation system.

Keywords: authentic assessment; educational assessment; Islamic religious education; nature-based education; non-test evaluation.

Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) carries a theological and pedagogical mandate that extends beyond secular knowledge transfer, focusing holistically on the formation of students' complete personality, encompassing spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social dimensions (Kunandar, 2015a). In the Indonesian national education landscape, the existence of PAI is conceptualized not merely as a cognitive instrument for memorizing religious doctrines, but as a pivot for character development, internalization of moral values, and the growth of deep existential-religious awareness (Arifin, 2017). This transformative vision is substantively aligned with the great ideals of national education law as stipulated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which mandates the development of students' latent potential to transform into human beings who believe in, fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become responsible citizens. Thus, all forms of pedagogical intervention in Islamic Religious Education, especially in the realm of evaluation and assessment of learning, must absolutely be able to reflect the entire spectrum of humanity in a balanced manner, which integrates the cognitive (reasoning), affective (feeling), and psychomotor (acting) dimensions without any reduction

(Marzuki, 2015). Effective religious learning requires a methodological harmony between what is believed in the heart, understood by reason, and actualized in the practice of everyday social life (M. Halstead, 2004).

However, the empirical reality on the ground reveals a deeply worrying paradigmatic deviation. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning evaluation practices in modern educational institutions remain trapped in the hegemony of reductionist cognitivism (Mardapi, 2012). Learning evaluation remains dominated by conventional, massive-scale written tests focused solely on measuring memorization capacity, textual comprehension, and mastery of theoretical religious concepts. This pathological phenomenon systematically ignores and marginalizes the affective and psychomotor domains, two crucial dimensions that are truly the epicenter of Islamic education: the formation of noble morals and the cultivation of consistent religious behavior (Syahraini, 2021). When educational evaluation is reduced to merely calculating cognitive test scores, the noble essence of religious learning as a guide to spirituality will be seriously diminished, becoming a mere academic formality for the sake of meeting administrative standards. The wide gap between the theological ideals of Islamic education and the pragmatic realities of evaluation emphasizes the urgency of a radical reorientation towards a more holistic, contextual, and meaningful assessment approach, to ensure that learning outcomes authentically reflect the development of human nature (Tayeb, 2018).

In an effort to bridge this paradigmatic gap, the concept of fitrah-based education (fitrah-based education) presents itself as a solution-based and restorative alternative that positions students as active subjects equipped with innate potential from birth to know, love, and serve Allah SWT (Asmani, 2011). The theological construction of human fitrah, firmly rooted in the revelation signal in the Qur'an, Surah Ar-Rum, verse 30, emphasizes that every individual is born in a state of purity with a strong natural tendency towards universal truth and monotheism. Fitrah-based education views evaluation activities not as a tool for judgment or labeling the ranking of students' intellectual abilities, but as a diagnostic, formative, and supportive process designed to guide, nurture, and develop the integrity of the potential of the mind (intellect), heart (spirit), and charity (action) simultaneously (Ibda, 2019a). Through this theoretical perspective, learning assessment is no longer seen as merely a quantitative evaluative process at the end of learning (assessment of learning), but rather becomes an integral part of the ongoing spiritual, moral, and character development process (assessment as learning) (Sahin, 2018).

Within the general taxonomy of educational evaluation, there are three main pillars of assessment models that can be operationalized in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning: the test model, the non-test model, and the authentic assessment model (Majid, 2014). The test model is methodologically designed to measure students' cognitive maturity and intellectual analytical skills regarding Islamic law (Gipps, 1994). Meanwhile, non-test models, such as structured observation, self-assessment, and peer assessment, are highly effective in capturing students' affective dimensions, moral disposition, emotional maturity, and spiritual commitment (Black & Wiliam, 1998). At the highest level, the authentic assessment model offers a comprehensive evaluation approach that requires students to demonstrate the integration of their religious knowledge and spiritual attitudes into concrete performance in real-life situations (Kunandar, 2015a). Although each model has its own characteristics, advantages and technical limitations, the three should not be positioned dichotomously or mutually exclusive. On the other hand, harmonious and proportional integration of the three assessment models will produce an evaluation system that is solid, balanced, and fully compatible with the noble principles of Islamic education based on nature (Lubis et al., 2011).

Previous literature has demonstrated that the application of authentic assessment significantly contributes to the formation of religious character, increased self-efficacy, and social awareness in students (Basri & Hidayat, 2020). Through socio-religious project-based assignments, contextual worship simulations, or the development of reflective portfolios, students are not solely assessed based on the final product in the form of a number, but are valued throughout the process of searching for meaning that reflects the internalization of Islamic values in real-life actions (Marzuki, 2015). In line with this, the use of non-test instruments such as personal reflection journals and observations of daily behavior has been proven to assist educators in mapping the dynamics of students' inner development and spirituality, which are often undetected by formal written assessments. However,

scientific documentation also shows that the practical implementation of this fitrah-based assessment still faces complex systemic and technical obstacles. Islamic Religious Education practitioners in schools often experience disorientation and methodological difficulties in designing, developing, and validating non-test and authentic assessment instruments with high reliability (Faisal & Rahman, 2022). The pressure of the national curriculum, which still tends towards large-scale cognitive standardization, forces teachers to adopt evaluation shortcuts that are oriented towards short-term results, sacrificing the long-term spiritual development process that is oriented towards the development of natural instincts (Nurhayati & Prasetyo, 2021b).

Herein lies a fundamental and crucial research gap. Most previous research on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning evaluation tends to focus on technical administrative dimensions, compliance with secular curriculum regulations, or partial testing of the effectiveness of authentic assessment instruments without a strong theological foundation. There remains a significant literature gap on how to systematically reconstruct and integrate test, non-test, and authentic models under the philosophical umbrella of fitrah-based education. Most evaluation studies forget that assessment instruments in Islamic education bear a transcendental responsibility to measure not only what students know, but also how that knowledge nourishes the potential for monotheism within their souls. Therefore, an in-depth conceptual-philosophical study is needed to formulate an integrative, humanistic, and innately spiritual framework for Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This research seeks to fill this academic gap by offering a theoretical-paradigmatic reconstruction that harmoniously correlates assessment instruments with the existential dimensions of humankind: reason, heart, and deeds.

Based on the analytical background and research gaps that have been described, this study specifically aims to analyze assessment models in Islamic Religious Education learning, which include test, non-test, and authentic models, from the philosophical perspective of nature-based education (Nata, 2016). Through in-depth conceptual analysis, this study is directed to formulate a new paradigm of Islamic Religious Education learning evaluation system that is not only theoretically valid, but also applicable for educators in nurturing the human potential of students. Theoretically, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to enriching the global Islamic education evaluation science by offering an assessment model that is free from secular dichotomy. Practically, the output of this study is projected to become a methodological compass for Islamic Religious Education teachers in designing evaluation instruments that are humanistic, comprehensive, and highly spiritual. Ultimately, achieving the objectives of this research is a strategic step to return the essence of evaluation in Islamic education to its original purpose, namely as a sacred instrument to develop humans towards the status of *insan kamil*, a perfect figure who is solid in knowledge, firm in faith, and noble in real deeds (Sulaiman & Baharuddin, 2022).

Method

The methodological exploration in this study consciously adopted a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review design (Snyder, 2019). This theoretical choice is based on the argument that resolving evaluation disorientation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) does not require positivistic parametric statistical testing, but rather requires philosophical exploration, paradigm deconstruction, and in-depth conceptual synthesis of the three main pillars of assessment: test, non-test, and authentic instruments (Kunandar, 2015a). Through qualitative-philosophical analysis, this study rigorously traces the epistemological structure of each of these evaluation clusters. The ultimate goal is to map the level of relevance, alignment, and theological connectivity of evaluation instruments with the principles of human creation within the paradigm of fitrah-based education (Asmani, 2011). Literature review in this context is positioned not as merely a mechanical activity in collecting book drafts, but as an effort to critically reconstruct scientific texts and discourses in order to produce a new, coherent, and applicable conceptual framework for the development of a contemporary Islamic education evaluation system (Ibda, 2019b).

The data used as the raw material for analysis in this study comes from a wealth of theoretical literature and previous empirical research results, which are strictly classified into two main groups: primary and secondary data sources. The primary category is compiled from authoritative theoretical works that lay the epistemological foundations of educational evaluation and the philosophy of nature

in Islamic education. This primary data is operationalized as the main analytical tool to dissect the deepest anatomy of learning evaluation instruments. Meanwhile, secondary data sources are constructed from formal education regulatory documents, specifically Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 23 of 2016 concerning Educational Assessment Standards, relevant draft national curriculum policies, and reputable journal articles documenting the dynamics of authentic assessment implementation in contemporary curricula (Basri & Hidayat, 2020). The integration of these secondary data sources is crucial for capturing the practical realities and tactical obstacles that occur in classrooms (Faisal & Rahman, 2022).

The data collection procedure was designed using a structured documentation method, applying keyword-based literature searches to national and international indexed scientific journal databases. The initial operationalization step began with identifying literature using specific keyword combinations such as authentic Islamic Religious Education assessment, fitrah-based evaluation, affective in Islam, and fitrah-based education. Each document draft, book chapter, and scientific article that was successfully captured was then rigorously screened based on thematic relevance, year of publication, and publisher reputation. Data that passed verification were then read analytically, analyzed for information units, and systematically recorded using a theme classification sheet (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). This theme classification focused on three main pillars: cognitive assessment typology in the form of tests, affective evaluation methodology in the form of non-tests, and authentic performance assessment practices within the framework of developing human potential (Sulaiman & Baharuddin, 2022).

The operationalization of data analysis in this study relies entirely on qualitative content analysis techniques (Krippendorff, 2018). The data processing process adopts the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and includes three simultaneous, integrative stages (Miles et al., 2014). The first stage is filled with data reduction, namely the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data obtained from library documents. In this phase, all information that is not directly correlated with the PAI assessment model and the concept of fitrah is strictly eliminated to maintain the sharp focus of the study. The next step is continued with data presentation, which is realized by organizing information into a matrix of conceptual relationships and systematic descriptive narratives, including compiling a taxonomy of relationships between types of assessments and dimensions of human fitrah to facilitate the drawing of established theoretical synthesis. This process then concludes with drawing conclusions and verification, namely a systematic effort to formulate new theoretical propositions by linking the findings of the content analysis with the basic framework of moral philosophy, Islamic developmental psychology, and the noble goals of religious character formation (Lickona, 2013). To ensure the level of validity (trustworthiness) and validity of the analysis results, the researcher applied a data source triangulation technique which was carried out by comparing and critically confronting the views of various education experts, state policy documents, and empirical field research findings in order to eliminate the researcher's subjective bias (Patton, 1999).

Unlike quantitative research that relies on numerical statistical correlations, this study employs a conceptual-qualitative correlational analysis. This approach works by mapping the logical and functional alignment between the operational characteristics of Islamic Religious Education assessment instruments and the dimensions of the natural nature of human creation in Islamic theology. This reciprocal relationship is analyzed in depth through three integrative pathways: a theoretical analysis of the contribution of test models in stimulating the sharpness of rationality (the natural nature of reason), mapping the role of non-test models in monitoring moral-spiritual development (the natural nature of the heart), and proving the significance of authentic assessment models in realizing social piety (the natural nature of charity) (Nurhayati & Prasetyo, 2021a). Through this qualitative correlational analysis, the three assessment groups are reconstructed not as separate evaluation entities, but as a holistic, complementary evaluation system (Syahraini, 2021).

Procedurally, this research was conducted in four systematic phases, each strictly spanning four months. The first phase focused on formulating the background of the problem, sharpening the urgency of the study, and conducting a preliminary study of Islamic Religious Education evaluation issues in the field. The second phase focused on an inventory of global and domestic academic literature and relevant curriculum regulations. The third, crucial phase involved conducting a

conceptual content analysis that aligns assessment principles with human potential. The fourth phase concluded with a theoretical synthesis, the development of a draft integrative assessment framework, and the finalization of the scientific report. This structured methodology was implemented to ensure that the theoretical constructs generated from this literature review possess high academic reliability, are free from speculative bias, and are ready for empirical testing in further research at schools and Islamic schools (Basri & Hidayat, 2020).

Results and Discussion

The Nature and Reconstruction of the Assessment Paradigm in Islamic Education Learning Based on Nature

A thorough exploration of the nature of assessment in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) reveals symptoms of acute reductionism that have long plagued modern evaluation practices in various educational institutions. Current assessments of learning outcomes are often trapped within narrow, mechanistic administrative boundaries, and are solely oriented toward meeting formal curriculum targets. Educators tend to view evaluation activities merely as technical instruments for quantitatively measuring students' cognitive-rational achievements through monotonous, conventional written exams. This traditional, positivistic approach systematically disregards the integrity of the affective dimension, which embodies the essence of students' faith, spiritual sincerity, and moral nobility. At the same time, this evaluation model also neglects the psychomotor aspects that represent the practical application of religious values in everyday social life. This unequal reality has created a wide gap between mastery of religious material on paper and the actualization of noble character in the real world. This systemic failure emphasizes that partial assessment models are no longer adequate to guide the formation of a solid Muslim personality amidst the currents of contemporary secularization and moral disruption (Shaukat et al., 2024).

Facing the challenges of moral decadence, a philosophical reconstruction of the Islamic Religious Education evaluation paradigm demands a comprehensive theoretical and methodological reorientation at the grassroots level. This direction of change must lead to the creation of a harmonious functional balance between knowledge, faith, and good deeds in order to restore the essence of Islamic education to its proper path, namely the attainment of the status of a perfect human being (Habibi, 2024). Education in the true Islamic tradition never separates intellectual achievement from inner purity and social welfare. Ideal assessment must be designed as a reflection of the unity of Islamic epistemology that rejects the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. Through this reconstruction, evaluation is no longer seen as a cold and judgmental endpoint, but rather as an interactive part of the student's overall spiritual journey (Lin et al., 2026). Educators are required to possess intellectual courage in overthrowing the dominant orientation of numerical values in order to revive the spirit of evaluation that touches the deepest realm of human consciousness.

Within the framework of a fitrah-based educational philosophy, the essence of assessment is radically redefined, not as a tool of academic selection or discrimination that judges students for failure. Instead, assessment is positioned as a process of stimulation, spiritual curation, and educational facilitation aimed at nurturing, directing, and developing innate potential (fitrah), encompassing intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual aspects in an integral manner. Every human being is born pure, carrying a hanif (divine) potential, which requires a conducive learning environment for this potential to flourish to its full potential. Fitrah-based assessment places individual uniqueness as the primary starting point in formulating indicators of learning success, eliminating room for rigid standardization that stifles the diversity of human natural talents (Taimur & Sattar, 2020). By positioning themselves as guardians of fitrah, educators no longer act as cold judges in the classroom, but rather as warm and empathetic dialogue partners for the development of students' souls.

Through this rich theological and anthropological perspective, learning evaluation activities gain new legitimacy by carrying out three essential, dynamically intertwined functions (Papakostas, 2026). First, the diagnostic function works to deeply explore the spiritual potential, unique personality traits, and psychological obstacles faced by students in internalizing Islamic values. Second, the formative function acts as a developmental guide that provides continuous constructive feedback,

helping students improve the quality of their worship and social interactions without fear of being judged by grades. Third, the educative-reflective function provides a broad space for contemplation for students to honestly recognize their strengths and weaknesses, while simultaneously guiding them in carrying out spiritual transformation and cleansing of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*) independently. These three functions work simultaneously to ensure that the evaluation process does not leave academic trauma, but rather fosters a passion for continuous self-improvement before the Creator (Parrott et al., 2025).

Thus, assessment activities have elegantly shifted from being merely a mechanical-bureaucratic routine for measuring learning outcomes to an inseparable part of the ritual of worship (*ta'abbudi*) and noble moral guidance. Evaluation in this context successfully unites the demands of worldly and hereafter life in a harmonious and balanced manner. Measurement of cognitive aspects no longer stands empty without spiritual meaning, but is directly linked to human responsibility as caliphs on earth, carrying out a mission of mercy for the universe (Alfiyah et al., 2024). Every worksheet, group discussion, and social project assignment is intended as part of a sincere testimony of charity. When the essence of worship has permeated the evaluation system, the learning climate in schools will transform into a calm ecosystem, full of honesty, and imbued with divine values.

This holistic conceptualization of assessment is theoretically reinforced by various contemporary global literature highlighting the importance of character integration in spiritual education. Measuring students' moral and spiritual development requires flexible instruments that are not confined to a purely cognitive approach (Pike et al., 2021). Assessment in religious education must transcend theoretical memory to an existential understanding of humanity's relationship with God and fellow creatures (Nixon et al., 2022). When an education system isolates spirituality from its official evaluation instruments, it slowly leads students toward a void of meaning in life and self-alienation. Therefore, a *fitrah*-based assessment approach offers a comprehensive answer to the existential crisis plaguing modern education today.

Furthermore, the integration of moral values into school evaluation systems has been empirically proven to improve students' psychological well-being and resilience amidst increasingly complex social pressures (Ysseldyk et al., 2020). When students perceive that the evaluation process values their moral endeavors and character development, rather than merely the cold results of cognitive tests, they develop a more positive and resilient self-concept. Religious education should be positioned as an active process of spiritual guidance, where evaluation serves as a reflective mirror to assess the extent to which sacred teachings have been embodied in concrete, everyday actions (Roffey, 2021). This approach, which integrates all dimensions of humanity, not only protects students' innate potential from destruction but also equips them with a strong moral compass to navigate the oceans of modern life filled with ethical uncertainty.

On the other hand, this paradigm reform in evaluation demands the professionalism of teachers, who not only master purely pedagogical aspects but also possess a deep personal spirituality. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must be able to translate abstract theological concepts into authentic assessment indicators that are down-to-earth, humane, and easily applicable without losing their scientific weight (Schweitzer & Boschki, 2023). Teachers are challenged to design creative evaluation instruments that capture the beauty of students' morals, sincere empathy, and consistent devotions without creating harmful subjective bias. The successful implementation of this innate-based assessment will ultimately depend heavily on the moral commitment of educators to view each student with compassion, as a field of charity that must be nurtured with meticulous care and patience to produce a golden generation of noble character.

This paradigm reconstruction brings fresh air to the future of Islamic education, which is often accused of stuttering in responding to the demands of modernity without losing its original identity. By placing nature as the primary axis and assessment as a means of safeguarding it, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning will emerge as an educational model that is enlightening, liberating, and at the same time soothing (Hussain & Wang, 2024). The evaluation system, built on this foundation of nature, believes that every academic achievement must lead to an increase in the quality of piety and a real contribution to humanity. Through a shared commitment to consistently implementing this new paradigm, the hope of realizing a civilized, knowledgeable, and noble society under the auspices of God's pleasure is no longer a utopian dream, but a historical inevitability that we are currently striving for in our classrooms.

Analysis of Test Assessment Models in Stimulating the Natural Sense (Cognitive Dimension)

Academic exploration of evaluation instruments in Islamic education places the test-based assessment model in a highly strategic and dilemmatic position. As a historically established measuring tool, tests continue to play a crucial role as the primary instrument for measuring, assessing, and evaluating students' cognitive depth in theoretical, dogmatic, and historical religious material. The operationalization of these tests is realized through two broad, complementary approaches. The first approach is objective tests such as multiple-choice, matching, and true-false, which are highly reliable for measuring basic thinking, recalling facts, and quickly identifying fundamental theological concepts. The second approach is subjective instruments such as essays, case studies, or open-ended descriptive questions designed to stimulate students' critical, analytical, and argumentative thinking skills in responding to the various dynamics of contemporary Islamic thought (Sudijono, 2013).

The methodological advantages of this test model lie in its high administrative efficiency, established standardization, consistent level of objectivity of measurement results, and its reliable function as an initial diagnostic instrument to map the cognitive map and conceptual understanding of students before proceeding to more complex levels of learning. However, the epistemological limitations inherent in this instrument lie in its inability to touch the abstract inner realm, the depth of spirituality, sincerity of intention, and its failure to detect whether this cognitive understanding of religion has been fully internalized into sincere concrete actions in the social space (Kempton, 2026). Extensive knowledge of religious moral concepts on the test sheet often does not correlate linearly with students' daily behavior when interacting with a pluralistic social reality.

To overcome these theoretical limitations, within the framework of nature-based education, the test model must be philosophically reconstructed not merely as a tool to measure the accumulation of religious memorization, but as a means of intellectual stimulation to hone and awaken the potential of the natural mind. Reason in Islamic epistemology is not a secular entity separate from faith, but rather a divine gift that functions as a tool for humans to reflect on God's creation, grasp universal truth, and clearly distinguish between the values of goodness (al-haqq) and the path of error (al-batil) (Guessoum, 2010). The function of test instruments in the learning process should not be left to stand alone, partially devoid of spiritual meaning. Instead, this cognitive evaluation must be closely linked to the development of the dimensions of the heart and commitment to real charity. This integrative step is crucial so that the theological knowledge acquired by students in the classroom does not stagnate as dead memorization empty of value, but is successfully transformed gradually into a living, active, and dynamic moral awareness (Miir, 2025).

The need to reconstruct cognitive evaluation to align with the formation of noble character has received significant attention in contemporary global educational discourse. Efforts to integrate critical thinking skills with ethical sensitivity in formal evaluation have been shown to increase students' personal responsibility for their religious understanding (Hariyanto, 2025). Evaluations that solely emphasize memorization without stimulating critical reflection can actually stifle students' natural intellectual potential and distance them from a deep understanding of religion. Therefore, cognitive assessment instruments must be designed in such a way as to stimulate higher-order thinking skills combined with an existential awareness of the role of humans as responsible creatures of God (XIE, 2025).

The tendency of conventional evaluation to overemphasize objective tests risks reducing the essence of religious teachings to mere piles of dry historical information lacking spiritual values. Research in cognitive psychology and character education shows that deep cognitive engagement in resolving religious moral dilemmas through reflective essay questions can strengthen an individual's moral commitment (Jia & Wu, 2025). When students are faced with evaluation scenarios that require them to analyze humanitarian issues from an Islamic ethical perspective, they not only activate their purely cognitive capacities but also train their sensitivity. This cognitive-reflective evaluation approach serves as a crucial bridge connecting intellectual acuity with the maturity of students' spiritual character (Saputra et al., 2026).

Furthermore, the transformation of test assessment models in schools requires a restructuring of question instruments to capture aspects of moral reasoning in a measurable manner. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are required to not only construct questions that ask for theoretical definitions or pillars of worship, but also present contextual cases that force students to use their

reason to find ethical solutions based on Islamic teachings (Sahin, 2021). This problematic and applicable question design trains student's natural intellect to always seek harmony between the knowledge they learn and the broader benefit of humanity. Thus, written exams are no longer viewed as stressful moments that drain memory, but rather as spaces for intellectual reflection that enlighten and foster self-awareness.

Developing cognitive capacity integrated with the spiritual dimension is also believed to equip the younger generation with strong mental and intellectual resilience to filter the flood of information and deviant ideologies in the digital age. The ability to sort information, critique false narratives, and uphold the principles of religious truth are concrete manifestations of the functioning of a healthy intellect (Zoglauer, 2023). A holistically designed test assessment system helps ensure that students' cognitive competencies are not merely cold academic intelligence, but rather intellectual wisdom guided by the light of faith. Through evaluations that demand honest thinking, students are accustomed to appreciating the process of seeking scientific truth as part of their devotion to the Creator.

The practical implementation of this new paradigm of cognitive assessment certainly demands professional readiness from educators in developing comprehensive, fair, and transparent assessment rubrics. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must move beyond their comfort zone of creating instant, low-level memory questions and shift to developing question banks rich in spiritually infused religious literacy and numeracy stimuli (Roald, 2024). This challenge will require considerable academic energy and dedication, but the projected results will be invaluable for the future of Islamic civilization. When testing instruments are successfully reformed into a means of purifying the mind, Islamic schools will be able to produce future Muslim scholars who not only master modern science globally but also possess strong faith and noble morals.

Theoretically, the integration of intellectual development and inner guidance in religious evaluation reinforces Islamic education's position as an alternative educational model that transcends the shallowness of secularism and the dangers of blind dogmatism. A sound evaluation system respects students' freedom of thought within the framework of divine ethics, thus fostering moderate, tolerant, and inclusive religious thought (Tayeb, 2021). The success of the natural intellect in grasping the sacred messages of God's revelation will be the primary guide for human physical actions in spreading goodness on earth (Nel, 2023). The commitment to designing and implementing this cognitive-spiritual assessment model is an urgent agenda that must be voiced by Islamic education policymakers to protect the golden potential of the younger generation from the threat of shallow thinking and life disorientation.

Throughout this conceptual analysis, the position of the test model in Islamic Religious Education evaluation has been positioned proportionally and dignifiedly within the conceptualization of fitrah-based education. Tests are not discarded as too cognitive, nor are they deified as the sole measure of student learning success. Tests are positioned as an important initial step in building a solid scientific foundation, which must then be immediately followed by proof of attitudes through non-test instruments and proof of work through authentic assessment. This harmonious methodological synergy between the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects will ensure the birth of a complete Muslim figure who is intelligent in mind, pure in heart, and whose charitable contributions to the progress of the nation and universal humanity are tangible (Busthomi et al., 2024).

Analysis of Test Assessment Models in Stimulating the Natural Sense (Cognitive Dimension)

Academic exploration of evaluation instruments in Islamic education places the test-based assessment model in a highly strategic and yet dilemmatic position (Rohim & Al Madzaly, 2025). As a historically established measuring tool, tests continue to play a crucial role as the primary instrument for measuring, assessing, and evaluating students' cognitive depth in theoretical, dogmatic, and historical religious material. The operationalization of these tests is realized through two broad, complementary approaches. The first approach is objective tests such as multiple-choice, matching, and true-false, which are highly reliable for measuring basic thinking, recalling facts, and quickly identifying fundamental theological concepts. The second approach is subjective instruments such as essays, case studies, or open-ended descriptive questions designed to stimulate students' critical, analytical, and argumentative thinking skills in responding to the various dynamics of contemporary Islamic thought.

The methodological advantages of this test model lie in its high administrative efficiency, established standardization, consistent level of objectivity of measurement results, and its reliable function as an initial diagnostic instrument to map cognitive maps and conceptual understanding of students before proceeding to more complex levels of learning. However, the epistemological limitations inherent in this instrument lie in its inability to touch the abstract inner realm, the depth of spirituality, sincerity of intention, and its failure to detect whether this cognitive understanding of religion has been fully internalized into sincere concrete actions in the social space (Kurniawan et al., 2025). Extensive knowledge of religious moral concepts on the test sheet often does not correlate linearly with students' daily behavior when interacting with a pluralistic social reality.

To overcome these theoretical limitations, within the framework of nature-based education, the test model must be philosophically reconstructed, not merely as a tool to measure the accumulation of religious memorization, but as a means of intellectual stimulation to hone and awaken the potential of the natural mind. Reason in Islamic epistemology is not a secular entity separate from faith, but rather a divine gift that functions as a tool for humans to reflect on God's creation, grasp universal truth, and clearly distinguish between the values of goodness (*al-haqq*) and the path of error (*al-batil*). The function of test instruments in the learning process must not be left to stand alone, partially devoid of spiritual meaning (Adiyono et al., 2024). Instead, this cognitive evaluation must be closely linked to the development of the heart dimension and commitment to real charity. This integrative step is crucial so that the theological knowledge acquired by students in the classroom does not stagnate as dead memorization empty of value, but is successfully transformed gradually into a living, active, and dynamic moral awareness (Nata, 2016).

The need to reconstruct cognitive evaluation to align with the formation of noble character has received significant attention in contemporary global educational discourse. Efforts to integrate critical thinking skills with ethical sensitivity in formal evaluation have been shown to enhance students' personal responsibility for their religious understanding (Arthur, 2021). Evaluations that solely emphasize memorization without stimulating critical reflection can actually stifle students' natural intellectual potential and distance them from a deep understanding of religion. Therefore, cognitive assessment instruments must be designed in such a way as to stimulate higher-order thinking skills combined with an existential awareness of the role of humans as responsible creatures of God (J. M. Halstead, 2020).

The tendency of conventional evaluation to overemphasize objective tests risks reducing the essence of religious teachings to mere piles of dry historical information lacking spiritual values. Research in cognitive psychology and character education shows that deep cognitive engagement in resolving religious moral dilemmas through reflective essay questions can strengthen an individual's moral commitment (Walker, 2022). When students are faced with evaluation scenarios that require them to analyze humanitarian issues from an Islamic ethical perspective, they not only activate their purely cognitive capacities but also train their sensitivity. This cognitive-reflective evaluation approach serves as a crucial bridge connecting intellectual acuity with the maturity of students' spiritual character (Aziz et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the transformation of test assessment models in schools requires a restructuring of question instruments to capture aspects of moral reasoning in a measurable manner. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are required to not only construct questions that ask for theoretical definitions or pillars of worship, but also present contextual cases that force students to use their reason to find ethical solutions based on Islamic teachings (Sahin, 2021). This problematic and applicable question design trains student's natural intellect to always seek harmony between the knowledge they learn and the broader benefit of humanity. Thus, written exams are no longer viewed as stressful moments that drain memory, but rather as spaces for intellectual reflection that enlighten and foster self-awareness.

Developing cognitive capacity integrated with the spiritual dimension is also believed to equip the younger generation with strong mental and intellectual resilience to filter the flood of information and deviant ideologies in the digital age. The ability to sort information, critique false narratives, and uphold the principles of religious truth are concrete manifestations of the functioning of a healthy intellect (Jackson, 2023). A holistically designed test assessment system helps ensure that students' cognitive competencies are not merely cold academic intelligence, but rather intellectual wisdom guided by the light of faith. Through evaluations that demand honest thinking, students are

accustomed to appreciating the process of seeking scientific truth as part of their devotion to the Creator (Conley et al., 2023).

The practical implementation of this new paradigm of cognitive assessment certainly demands professional readiness from educators in developing comprehensive, fair, and transparent assessment rubrics. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must move beyond their comfort zone of creating instant, low-level memory questions and shift to developing question banks rich in spiritually infused religious literacy and numeracy stimuli (Roald, 2024). This challenge will require considerable academic energy and dedication, but the projected results will be invaluable for the future of Islamic civilization. When testing instruments are successfully reformed into a means of purifying the mind, Islamic schools will be able to produce future Muslim scholars who not only master modern science globally but also possess strong faith and noble morals.

Theoretically, the integration of intellectual development and inner guidance in religious evaluation reinforces Islamic education's position as an alternative educational model that transcends the shallowness of secularism and the dangers of blind dogmatism. A sound evaluation system respects students' freedom of thought within the framework of divine ethics, thus fostering moderate, tolerant, and inclusive religious thought (Tayeb, 2021). The success of the natural intellect in grasping the sacred messages of God's revelation will be the primary guide for human physical actions in spreading goodness on earth. The commitment to designing and implementing this cognitive-spiritual assessment model is an urgent agenda that must be voiced by Islamic education policymakers to protect the golden potential of the younger generation from the threat of shallow thinking and life disorientation (Kelley-Gillespie, 2009).

Throughout this conceptual analysis, the position of the test model in Islamic Religious Education evaluation has been positioned proportionally and dignifiedly within the conceptualization of fitrah-based education. Tests are not discarded as too cognitive, nor are they deified as the sole benchmark for student learning success. Tests are positioned as an important initial step in building a solid scientific foundation, which must then be immediately followed by proof of attitudes through non-test instruments and proof of work through authentic assessment. This harmonious methodological synergy between the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects will ensure the birth of a complete Muslim figure who is intelligent in mind, pure in heart, and whose charitable contributions to the progress of the nation and universal humanity are real (Bahri et al., 2025).

Analysis of Non-Test Assessment Models in Sharpening the Heart's Nature (Affective-Spiritual Dimension)

Efforts to balance and overcome the inherent limitations of conventional testing models in capturing the depths of the human soul have given rise to a theoretical urgency for the application of non-test assessment models. Non-test instruments exist not merely as administrative complements, but as strategic approaches specifically designed to uncover the affective, social relations, and spiritual dynamics of students that are impossible to reach through the coldness of written exam scores. The use of a variety of non-test instruments, ranging from systematic observation of daily religious behavior, in-depth reflective interviews, self-assessment methods, writing daily reflection journals, to completing spiritual attitude questionnaires, opens up opportunities for educators to monitor the process of religious character development periodically (Rusdiana et al., 2026). Through consistent and ongoing monitoring, essential aspects such as sincerity of worship, sensitivity to social empathy, moral resilience, and integrity of students' personalities can be read more fully (Mahirah, 2017).

The primary epistemological advantage of this non-test model lies in its extraordinary capacity to present a rich, in-depth, and authentic portrait of the internal psychological dynamics and commitment to religious values held personally by students in their daily socio-religious lives (Majid, 2019). While conventional assessments are only capable of capturing the end result of the cognitive process, non-test assessments operate within the process, tracing the traces of attitudinal changes, and documenting students' moral struggles in internalizing sacred religious teachings. However, the practical application of this non-test model in the field often faces the challenge of highly subjective assessors. This reality demands that educators possess methodological discipline in developing assessment rubrics, precise descriptor instruments, and measurable and systematic observation guidelines to minimize personal bias and maintain the scientific validity of the evaluation results (Kunandar, 2015b).

When examined in depth from the perspective of theology of nature, the non-test model is substantively oriented as a sacred instrument to hone, direct, and educate the potential of the heart's nature (qalb). Its main focus is emphasized through the habituation of a structured self-introspection mechanism (muhasabah), a spiritual process that guides students to always align their inner faith beliefs with concrete actions in the form of social order and deep concern for humanity (Muhaimin, 2012). The heart in the discourse of Islamic education is positioned as the control center of human behavior, so that its purity and sharpness in capturing ethical signals of faith are absolute prerequisites for the birth of individual piety as well as true social piety. Through honest self-evaluation activities, students are invited to recognize themselves completely before the Creator, transforming the classroom into a mihrab of contemplation that matures the soul.

In the conceptualization of contemporary global moral education, the shift toward integrated affective-spiritual assessment is believed to be the key to protecting the mental health of young people from exposure to social alienation. Measuring students' character should no longer use rigid positivistic standards, but rather employ a humanistic-spiritual approach that respects the dynamics of human spiritual growth (Lovat, 2020). Empathetically designed affective assessments have been shown to foster a sense of psychological safety in students, which in turn strengthens their moral resilience in facing various ethical temptations outside the school environment. An evaluative approach that prioritizes respect for the uniqueness of students' inner development will foster a healthy academic climate conducive to the growth of genuine spiritual values (Fernández Espinosa & Domingo, 2025).

Furthermore, the integration of self-reflection and religious journaling into the curriculum has been shown to significantly increase students' ethical awareness and social sensitivity on a sustainable basis (Okoronkwo, 2021). Reflective journals serve as a medium for personal theological dialogue, allowing students to express their doubts, beliefs, spiritual experiences, and moral conflicts without fear of judgmental academic sanctions. Through this honest writing process, students are trained to critique their own behavior, evaluate the consistency between their religious beliefs and their daily actions, and formulate independent resolutions for self-improvement. This reflective writing activity indirectly trains students' consciences, encouraging them to be sensitive to promptings of goodness and reject all forms of ethical evil.

On the other hand, the successful implementation of non-test assessments requires a restructuring of the educator's role from merely an academic examiner to a wise spiritual mentor. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are required to possess a high level of emotional sensitivity to detect even the smallest behavioral changes in students and to provide affective feedback that soothes the soul, not undermines self-confidence (Noddings, 2022). A dialogic relationship built on compassion and mutual trust between teachers and students is the primary foundation for the reliability of non-test assessment data. Without a genuine emotional connection, self-assessment instruments or attitude questionnaires will be filled out by students with formal, manipulative answers to please the teacher, thus losing their substantive truth value (Whitley et al., 2026).

The challenge of subjectivity in affective religious assessment can actually be overcome by implementing a data triangulation approach that involves various parties collaboratively. Assessment of students' religious behavior should ideally not rely solely on the single observation of a single teacher at school, but rather integrate the perspectives of parents at home, peers in the classroom, and community leaders in the neighborhood (Watson et al., 2023). Through this synergy of multi-source assessment, teacher subjectivity bias can be significantly reduced, and the profile of students' spiritual development can be depicted more comprehensively and balanced. Close collaboration between family, school, and community institutions in overseeing this affective evaluation process also emphasizes the collective responsibility for preserving the sanctity of the innate potential of the nation's future generations (Melaku & Pastor Ivars, 2025).

Studies in the sociology of religious education also show that school climates that place a strong emphasis on humanistic, non-test-based evaluations have significantly lower rates of bullying and social deviance (Kristjánsson, 2024). When the evaluation system values honesty, social awareness, sincerity in helping others, and polite language on a par with cognitive academic achievement, students are motivated to compete with each other in collective goodness. Schools are no longer perceived as arenas of cruel, competitive competition, but rather transform into warm, welcoming, and socially religious laboratories filled with genuine bonds of human brotherhood.

This methodological transformation ultimately demands accommodating curriculum policy support from macro-level decision-makers. Education regulations must provide sufficient space for teachers to explore non-test assessments without being burdened by the administrative demands of excessive quantitative score reporting (Carr, 2021). Flexibility in documenting students' spiritual character development needs to be accommodated in a report card format or narrative portfolio that is more child-friendly. With supportive regulations, Islamic Religious Education teachers will have the creative freedom to design character development programs and moral evaluations that are more contextual, meaningful, and have a long-term impact on students' futures.

Philosophically, honing the natural instinct of the heart through non-test instruments is a concrete step towards restoring the transcendental dimension to the heart of modern education, long stifled by the grip of extreme positivism. Religious education must not allow humans to grow into intellectual giants devoid of spirituality, but rather educate the soul to sense the divine presence in every breath of life (Purpel & McLaurin, 2022). Through an evaluation process that touches the depths of the soul, students are accustomed to always maintaining the purity of their hearts from heart ailments such as arrogance, falsehood, greed, and social hatred. When the natural instinct of the heart is always kept clean and sensitive, all human life's movements will radiate as a tangible manifestation of the noble values of peace, justice, and universal compassion.

Analysis of Authentic Assessment Model in Realizing the Nature of Charity (Psychomotor-Contextual Dimension)

The culmination of the entire Islamic education process lies not in the amount of theological information students can accumulate in their cognitive memory, but rather in how that knowledge manifests itself in concrete actions that benefit humanity. In this conceptualization, the authentic assessment model plays a crucial role as an epistemological and axiological bridge, integrating theoretical knowledge and inner values into concrete, contextualized actions (Tree & Worsfold, 2026). Authentic assessment rejects the separation between theory and practice and views the learning process as a dynamic, organic whole. Through this approach, evaluation activities are designed to reflect real-world situations, challenging students to apply their religious understanding to solve various problems of everyday life (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2021). Evaluation is no longer viewed as an alien activity separate from reality, but rather as a natural extension of the life process itself, demanding direct moral responsibility.

The implementation of authentic assessment in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is carried out creatively through various structured assignments that require the active involvement of students holistically (Sarwo Edy et al., 2024). These assignments include socio-religious projects targeting humanitarian issues in the surrounding environment, the development of development portfolios documenting students' spiritual journeys, live worship practice exams to measure ritual accuracy, simulations of polite contextual preaching, and active student involvement in community service activities based on Islamic values (Kunandar, 2015b). Each of these assignment models is designed to transcend the physical boundaries of the classroom, forcing students to interact directly with diverse social realities. Through these direct experiences, abstract concepts such as social concern, justice, tolerance, and human brotherhood are no longer merely memorization for exams, but become life principles that are actively and consciously practiced.

The main characteristic of the authentic assessment model is its holistic, comprehensive, and contextual nature, enabling students to develop higher-order thinking skills in solving social problems around them using an Islamic ethical perspective (Sutrisno, 2009). When students are faced with complex project assignments, their intellectual capacity is stimulated to conduct in-depth analysis, synthesize ideas, and critically evaluate various available alternative solutions (Koh & Tan, 2021). This process encourages a deep internalization of values, as students are not only required to know what is right but also to understand why it must be done and how to implement it effectively in society. Thus, authentic assessment successfully shifts the evaluation paradigm from merely testing short-term memory to developing a mature ethical thinking capacity that is responsive to changing times.

The application of this contextual evaluation model has been proven to have a very significant impact on the formation of individual and social piety in students across various dimensions of their lives (Putra & Syarifuddin, 2019). Authentic assessment provides space for the growth of strong self-awareness, because each activity evaluated is directly relevant to students' existential needs as social

beings and servants of God. When students feel that what they learn and do has a real impact on their surroundings, their intrinsic motivation to learn and do good will increase dramatically (Clanton Harpine, 2024). Involvement in socio-religious projects, for example, can train social sensitivity, reduce individualistic egoism, and foster deep empathy for the suffering of others. The formation of this noble character occurs naturally through a process of habituation to concrete actions, not through forced verbal indoctrination.

Despite offering numerous philosophical and practical advantages, the implementation of authentic assessment in practice is often hampered by limited learning time and the high demands on teachers' professional competence in designing reliable assessment instruments and rubrics (Sari & Roslan, 2021). Authentic assessment requires thorough preparation, intensive monitoring, and a relatively longer evaluation time compared to conventional written tests. Educators are required to possess advanced skills in designing assessment rubrics that are not only objective and valid but also capable of capturing the qualitative nuances of students' religious development (Jonsson, 2021). Heavy administrative burdens and a lack of professional training focused on modern assessment techniques often discourage educators from consistently implementing this model in their classrooms.

These operational challenges are complicated by the fact that the national curriculum is often dominated by a quantitative learning outcome orientation that prioritizes academic graduation based on national exams or standardized tests. This situation creates unique pressures for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) educators, who are caught between the moral idealism of developing students' noble character and the pragmatic demands of institutions to achieve administrative graduation targets (Carless & Winstone, 2023). As a result, authentic assessment is often reduced to a mere formality of filling out paperwork without any meaningful learning. Systemic reforms in national education evaluation policies are needed to provide methodological flexibility for educators to explore students' potential in a more humanistic and contextual way (Mincu et al., 2025).

To overcome these obstacles, developing educators' professional capacity to design authentic assignments integrated with daily activities is key to the success of this evaluation reform. Educators need to be equipped with a deep understanding of how to develop flexible yet measurable assessment indicators and how to utilize digital technology to simplify the process of documenting student development portfolios (Ajjawi et al., 2022). Collaboration between educators in designing cross-subject projects can also be a smart solution to address limited learning time allocation in schools (Guo et al., 2026). Through harmonious collaboration, students' learning burdens can be reduced while maintaining the optimal quality of authentic learning experiences.

In the conceptualization of *fitrah*-based education, authentic assessment is positioned with respect as the primary vehicle for actualizing the innate nature of good deeds. This innate dimension demands absolute harmony between acquired knowledge and actual actions, so that students grow not only into conceptually pious individuals but also productive *amils* in practicing pious values in the real world (Suwardi, 2018). Faith in the Islamic perspective is not a passive entity that stops at inner conviction, but rather an active force that encourages the birth of real pious deeds as existential proof. Authentic assessment ensures that the sanctity of innate nature is not degraded by negative environmental influences, but rather develops into a positive energy that drives moral and social improvement within society.

The actualization of the innate nature of charity through authentic assessment aligns closely with global demands regarding the importance of equipping the younger generation with relevant transformative competencies to face the challenges of the 21st century. Educational institutions are challenged to produce graduates with cognitive flexibility, ethical sensitivity, and collaborative skills in solving complex social problems (McArthur, 2021). Religious evaluation must demonstrate that spiritual values have a real contribution in offering solutions to the humanitarian crises, environmental degradation, and social injustices plaguing the world today. Through authentic assignments oriented toward the public good, students are accustomed to viewing themselves as agents of social change carrying out a mission of peace and prosperity for the entire universe.

The close relationship between concrete actions and spiritual growth is also confirmed by various contemporary theoretical studies that emphasize the importance of experiential learning in character formation. Meaningful learning occurs when someone directly engages in concrete actions, critically reflects on those experiences, and conceptualizes new values to apply to future situations (Skeaff et al., 2023). Authentic assessment perfectly facilitates this learning cycle by providing

formative feedback that helps students understand the spiritual meaning behind every physical activity they undertake. Worship is no longer performed mechanically without soul, but rather experienced as a form of transcendental communication that has a vertical impact on God and a horizontal impact on fellow human beings.

Furthermore, the development of inclusive and fair authentic assessments also contributes to the creation of a learning environment that values the diverse talents and natural potential of each student. Every human being is born with unique innate abilities; some have strong intellectual tendencies, others excel in social leadership capacities, and still others are gifted with a heightened aesthetic sensitivity. Authentic assessment provides space for each of these unique abilities to express themselves optimally through a variety of assignment options (Tai et al., 2021). Thus, students do not feel discriminated against by a rigid testing model that values only one type of intelligence, but rather feel valued for their existence as special creations of God with unique contributions to collective progress.

The synergy between meeting academic standards and maintaining the sanctity of the natural virtue of charity will ultimately lead to the birth of a golden generation of Muslims with complete personal integrity. This generation is one capable of combining the power of dhikr (remembrance of God) that fosters peace of mind, the sharpness of thought that fosters scientific innovation, and the power of charity that fosters true social piety (Alam & Mohanty, 2023). Through a collective commitment to consistently and wisely implementing authentic assessment, the world of Islamic education will be able to prove its existence as a moral force that enlightens civilization. The evaluation process will no longer be feared as a stressful threat, but rather welcomed with joy as a stage to demonstrate the true work of devotion to the Creator and our beloved homeland.

Conclusion

This in-depth study successfully addresses the problematic of evaluative reductionism in Islamic Religious Education through the reconstruction of a fitrah-based assessment paradigm that comprehensively integrates test, non-test, and authentic models. The main findings of this study emphasize that the fragmentation of evaluation instruments that have been dominated by cognitive tests risks degrading the transcendental essence of Islamic teachings, so that systematic reconstruction is absolutely necessary to align evaluation with the structure of human creation. Through this conceptual framework, the test model is reoriented to stimulate the fitrah of reason (intellectual capacity), the non-test model is optimized to hone the fitrah of the heart (affective-spiritual dimension), while the authentic model is positioned as the pinnacle of the embodiment of the fitrah of charity (psychomotor-contextual dimension).

Theoretically, this study implies an epistemological shift from a secular-positivistic evaluation paradigm to a theo-humanistic evaluation model that views assessment activities as part of moral guidance and soul purification. Practical implications of this study require Islamic Religious Education educators to transform their roles from mere academic examiners to spiritual mentors, and encourage schools to develop multi-source collaborative assessment rubrics to minimize subjective bias. However, the main limitation of this study lies in its conceptual-philosophical nature, based on a literature review, thus requiring further empirical testing to assess its reliability and usability in heterogeneous school ecosystems. Therefore, further research is recommended to focus on classroom action research or longitudinal experiments to validate the effectiveness of this nature-based assessment framework, while also developing an adaptive digital rubric platform to support educators in the field.

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