



## **Implementation of Authentic Assessment of Islamic Religious Education in the Merdeka Curriculum: Qualitative Studies in the Cognitive, Affective, and Psychomotor Domains in Vocational High Schools**

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### ABSTRACT

The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum requires an authentic *Pendidikan Agama Islam* (PAI) assessment that evaluates learning outcomes holistically while providing feedback for learning improvement. The objectives of this study are (1) to describe the implementation of authentic PAI assessments in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in vocational schools; (2) to analyze the role of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in improving PAI learning quality through feedback and measurement of learning objectives; and (3) to reveal the dynamics of test and non-test techniques across all three domains, including the challenges, strategies, and best practices of educators in implementing authentic assessments. This study employed qualitative research with a case study design. Data were collected through interviews, learning observations, and documentation of teaching materials and assessment artifacts, then analyzed through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, accompanied by triangulation of sources and techniques. Cognitive assessment was carried out through written and oral tests and assignments; the affective domain through observation, attitude journals, self-assessment, and peer assessment; and the psychomotor domain through worship practice demonstrations and performance rubrics. The *Merdeka* Curriculum strengthens formative assessment and constructive feedback as a basis for remedial and enrichment activities and the adjustment of teaching strategies, while summative assessment maps the achievement of learning objectives and informs planning for the next cycle. Authentic PAI assessment in the *Merdeka* Curriculum improves learning quality through the integration of the three domains, the use of rubrics, and continuous feedback that drives process improvement and the achievement of learning objectives.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The transformation of Indonesia's education paradigm through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum marks a new era in a more flexible and student-centered learning system. The Merdeka Curriculum is an effort by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to improve the quality of national education by carrying out a more meaningful learning concept and oriented towards holistic competency development. This fundamental change not only touches on the aspect of learning content, but also revitalizes the assessment system from a conventional approach to a more comprehensive authentic assessment in measuring student learning achievement. This transformation momentum requires an in-depth evaluation of

assessment practices, especially in the subject of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) which has unique characteristics in integrating spiritual, moral, and practical religious skills. (Sumarsih and al. , 2022; Wulandari and al. , 2025a) ( Aisyah & Bustam, 2024)

The characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum that emphasizes content-based intracurricular learning with a more flexible time allocation provide optimal space for educators to develop learning strategies according to the needs and interests of students. The implementation of this curriculum has been carried out simultaneously in Indonesia with learning principles that focus on improving the competencies and character of students and providing comprehensive feedback for continuous improvement. In the context of Vocational High Schools/*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan* (SMK), the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has its own challenges considering the characteristics of vocational education that demand a balance between the mastery of academic competencies and practical skills relevant to the world of work. This complexity is increasingly seen in PAI subjects that not only develop cognitive aspects, but also shape students' religious character and practical worship skills. ( Sa'diyah and al. , 2024; Susanti and al. , 2025a) (Hamdi et al., 2022)

Authentic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum changes the orientation of assessment from simply measuring learning outcomes to a comprehensive evaluation process that reflects students' abilities in the context of real situations. This authentic assessment approach is in line with humanist theory which focuses on the holistic development of individual potential, including cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. In PAI learning, authentic assessments become a crucial instrument for measuring not only the conceptual understanding of Islamic teachings, but also the internalization of religious values in daily attitudes and behaviors as well as the skills of carrying out worship practices. The implementation of authentic assessments in PAI requires the use of various assessment techniques, ranging from written tests, observations, worship practices, to portfolios to accommodate the uniqueness of each learning domain. ( Aisyah & Bustam , 2024; Fitriyah et al., 2024) (Achmad and al. , 2022; Muktamar and al., 2024)

The reality of implementing authentic PAI assessments in vocational schools faces various complex challenges that require in-depth study. First, there is still a gap between the conceptual understanding of authentic assessment and the practice of its implementation in the field, where some educators still tend to use conventional assessment instruments that are more oriented towards purely cognitive aspects. Second, the ideal PAI learning evaluation should cover all three domains in a balanced manner, but the results of the study show that the assessment of the affective and psychomotor domains has not been carried out optimally compared to the cognitive domain. Third, there is a lack of a comprehensive understanding of how formative and summative assessments can be effectively integrated to improve the quality of PAI learning, especially in identifying students' learning difficulties and providing constructive feedback. (Efendi and al. , 2024; Rosidah, 2021) (Nadiyah and al. , 2024;

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Simatupang and al. , 2024) (Efendi and al. , 2024; Mujiburrahman et al., 2023)

The urgency of this research is motivated by the urgent need to understand the dynamics of the implementation of authentic PAI assessments within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum in the context of vocational schools. As an educational institution that prepares job-ready graduates, vocational schools need an assessment model that not only measures the mastery of religious knowledge, but also the formation of religious character and practical skills that are applicable in the world of work. The importance of this research is also based on the fact that assessment is an integral component that is inseparable from the learning process and has a significant impact on the quality of achieving learning objectives. Furthermore, research on the implementation of authentic PAI assessments that integrate the three learning domains comprehensively is still limited, so this research is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of the PAI learning evaluation system in vocational schools. (Minarti and al. , 2023; Susanti and al. , 2025b) (Ardiansyah and al. , 2023; Wulandari and al. , 2025b) (Nadiyah et al., 2024)

The research conducted by the title "Authentic Assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum Perspective of Humanism Theory" examines the correlation between humanism theory and assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum as well as the form of authentic assessment assessment that can be applied. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method and finds that there is a suitability of humanism theory with assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum, namely through the Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM) and Character Survey which carries the concept of authentic assessment. The similarity with the research to be conducted lies in the focus of the study of authentic assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum with a qualitative approach. As for the difference, this study is more specifically examining the implementation of authentic assessment in PAI subjects in vocational schools with an emphasis on three learning domains (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor), while Aisyah and Bustam's research is a theoretical study without the context of specific subjects. ( Aisyah & Bustam , 2024)

(Nadiyah and al. , 2024) conducted a study entitled "Evaluation of Islamic Religious Education Learning: A Review of the Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor Realm at SMA MTA Surakarta" which examined the evaluation of PAI learning reviewed from assessments in the three domains. The results showed that the evaluation of PAI learning in the cognitive realm was carried out in the form of formative and summative tests, for the affective domain using observation with various measurement scales, while the psychomotor domain used portfolio and practice methods. The similarity with this study is that they both examine the evaluation of PAI in the three domains of learning using a qualitative approach. The fundamental difference lies in the context of the curriculum used, where Akbar's research was carried out during the curriculum transition period and at the high school level, while this study specifically examines the implementation within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum at the vocational school

level with an emphasis on authentic assessment and the role of formative-summative assessment.

(Efendi and al. , 2024) In his research entitled "The Application of Formative and Summative Assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum in Madrasah Aliyah Private Darul Hadith Huta Baringin" describes assessment practices in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum at the madrasah level. The results of the study showed that the implementation of formative and summative assessments was not optimal, with the majority of students not reaching the required assessment completeness and only meeting 2 of the 4 summative assessment criteria set. The similarity of this research with the study to be carried out is to focus on the application of formative and summative assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum at the secondary education level with a qualitative approach. The difference lies in the scope of the study, where this study not only examines formative and summative assessments in general, but also analyzes in depth the dynamics of the application of test and non-test techniques in each cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domain, specifically in PAI subjects in the context of vocational schools.

The novelty of this research lies in three fundamental aspects that distinguish it from previous studies. First, this study integrates authentic assessment studies with comprehensive analysis of the three learning domains (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) holistically in one study, filling in the research gap that tends to partially focus only on one or two domains. Second, this study specifically reveals the dynamics of the application of test and non-test techniques in the context of PAI learning in vocational schools, an area that has not been widely explored given the unique characteristics of vocational education that combines academic competence and practical skills. Third, this study not only describes the form of assessment, but also analyzes in depth the role and contribution of formative and summative assessments in improving the quality of PAI learning, providing a more comprehensive perspective on the learning evaluation system within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. ( Sa'diyah et al., 2024; Zainudin & Ubabuddin , 2023) (Minarti and al. , 2023; Simatupang and al. , 2024) (Efendi and al. , 2024; Wulandari et al., 2025b)

Based on the background and problems that have been described, this study aims to: (1) Describe the form and implementation of PAI assessment in the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum in Vocational High Schools, including the instruments, techniques, and assessment procedures used by educators in measuring learning outcomes; (2) Analyze the role of the Merdeka Curriculum in improving the quality of PAI learning, including how the Merdeka Curriculum can contribute to providing feedback for improving the learning process and measuring the achievement of learning objectives; (3) Reveal the dynamics of the application of test and non-test techniques in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of students, including the challenges, strategies, and good practices carried out by educators in implementing authentic assessments in each learning domain.

This research is expected to provide significant theoretical and practical benefits to various education stakeholders. Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching the

scientific treasures of PAI learning assessment within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially related to the implementation of authentic assessments that integrate the three learning domains comprehensively. Practically, the results of this research can be a reference for PAI educators in designing and implementing assessments that are more authentic, meaningful, and in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. For vocational education institutions, the findings of this research can be used as material for evaluating and developing a more comprehensive and quality assessment system. The implications of this study also include policy recommendations for decision-makers at the school level and education offices related to the capacity development of educators in carrying out authentic assessments, the provision of valid and reliable assessment instruments, and the development of a more holistic learning outcome reporting system. Furthermore, this research is expected to be a foothold for further research that explores other aspects of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in PAI learning in various educational contexts.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Case studies were chosen because they allow researchers to understand a phenomenon in depth through the exploration of context and dynamics of practice in the field. In this study, a case study was used to comprehensively explore the implementation of authentic PAI assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum in the specific context of SMK Karang Ampel Indramayu. This study was classified as a single case study because it focused on one case to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Scott, 2019).

The object of the research was the implementation of authentic PAI assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum, with the focus on assessment practices encompassing the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of students. The research was conducted at SMK Karang Ampel Indramayu, Indramayu Regency, West Java, in the even semester of the 2025/2026 school year. This location was chosen because the school had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and had project-based learning characteristics that were relevant to examining authentic assessments in the context of vocational education.

The research data consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from key informants, namely the principal, deputy head of curriculum, three PAI teachers, and six students from various grade levels who were selected purposively. Secondary data were sourced from official school documents, such as the PAI curriculum, lesson plans, assessment instruments, gradebooks, learning outcome reports, and other supporting documents relevant to the implementation of authentic PAI assessments.

The population in this qualitative research included all activities of implementing authentic PAI assessments in the school, which encompassed the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of learning. The sample was determined using purposive sampling, which is the selection of informants based on considerations of suitability with the purpose of the research. The research instruments included interview guides, observation checklists, and documentation guidelines.

Data were collected through three main methods. First, participatory observation was conducted to directly observe the implementation of authentic PAI assessments in the classroom, including the forms and techniques of assessment in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, using structured observation guidelines. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants to explore their perceptions, experiences, and understandings related to the implementation of authentic assessments that could not be fully captured through observation. Third, a documentation study was conducted by collecting archives and written documents — including learning tools, assessment instruments, and students' work — as well as relevant photographs. The tools used included observation guidelines, interview guidelines, audio recorders, cameras, and field notes (H. Hasanah, 2016; Fadila et al., 2025; Sugiyono, 2016).

Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which included four stages: (1) data collection, (2) data reduction and condensation, (3) data presentation, and (4) conclusion drawing and verification. In the reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused on data relevant to the research objectives, then presented it in the form of narratives, tables, matrices, or diagrams so that patterns and themes were easier to identify, before drawing conclusions that were continuously verified based on field findings (Wijaya, 2018).

The validity of the data was maintained through triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was carried out in two forms: source triangulation, which involved comparing information from the school principal, PAI teachers, and students, and technical triangulation, which involved comparing interview results with observation and documentation results. Member checking was carried out by reconfirming the data and the researcher's interpretations with the informants to ensure that the meaning captured was in accordance with the informants' intentions. The analysis process took place continuously from the beginning to the end of the research until the data were considered saturated and sufficiently credible to answer the research questions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. PAI Authentic Assessment Orientation as an Assessment of Learning Process and Development**

PAI learning in the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Karang Ampel Indramayu shows that assessment is positioned as part of the learning process, not just the determination of final grades. Based on the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that *"The PAI evaluation not only assesses the final results, but also the learning process. This is done through attitude observation, daily task assessment, student activity, and worship practices so that the evaluation reflects the learning development of students as a whole."* These findings indicate that authentic assessments are directed to capture progress, so that assessment data becomes evidence of learning progress that is more meaningful than just scores.

In practice, the acceptance of authentic assessments is also supported by evaluation planning that from the beginning is associated with learning objectives and consistency of implementation. Based on the results of interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that, *"The principles of evaluation are ensured to be fulfilled by preparing an evaluation plan from the beginning, using instruments that are in accordance with learning objectives, conducting assessments on an ongoing basis, and using clear and transparent assessment rubrics and guidelines."* This statement corroborates the analysis that authentic assessment is not an incidental activity, but a system that is organized from planning to reporting with standards that are understood by teachers and students.

Authentic assessments are also understood as a mechanism to improve learning and at the same time build students' motivation to learn. This can be seen from the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, that *"Evaluation also functions to report learning outcomes, accountability to parents and schools, and increase student learning motivation."* These findings show that assessment not only functions administratively, but becomes a pedagogical instrument that encourages students to understand learning objectives as well as foster an internal drive to improve themselves. In the follow-up aspect, authentic assessments are supported by the delivery of constructive feedback that can be understood by students. Based on the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, he explained, that *"Feedback is very important... delivered orally or in writing in constructive language in order to motivate students to improve their learning outcomes and religious attitudes."* From this, the researcher assesses that authentic assessments work effectively when the results of the assessment do not stop at the recap of grades, but are processed into feedback that guides learning improvement.

## **2. The Role of the Merdeka Curriculum in Improving the Quality of PAI Learning through Feedback and Measurement of Learning Goal Achievement**

The Merdeka Curriculum encourages a shift in the orientation of PAI learning from just pursuing final grades to strengthening a meaningful and measurable learning process. From the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that: *"The main difference lies in the emphasis on formative assessment and character strengthening."* The researcher's analysis shows that this formative emphasis improves the quality of learning because teachers do not wait for the end of the semester to find out the learning problems, but rather read the progress from the beginning so that learning becomes more responsive and gradual.

In practice, the Merdeka Curriculum strengthens the function of assessment as a feedback mechanism that directly leads to the improvement of teaching strategies. From

the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that the Informant said: *"Formative evaluation is most often used because it serves to monitor the learning process and improve learning directly."* Based on these findings, the researcher assessed that formative is a tool for quality control of PAI learning: teachers can immediately adjust methods, improve material delivery, and adjust learning rhythms according to the real needs of students.

The contribution of the Merdeka Curriculum to feedback can also be seen from the way teachers convey assessment results so that they are educational and encourage changes in learning behavior. The results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that the Informant stated: *"Feedback is very important... delivered orally or in writing in constructive language in order to motivate students to improve their learning outcomes and religious attitudes."* The researcher analyzed that feedback like this strengthened the quality of PAI learning because students not only knew the "true", but understood what needed to be improved, how to improve, and why improvement was important for the development of religious attitudes.

In addition to being formative, the Merdeka Curriculum also emphasizes the importance of measuring the achievement of learning objectives through the analysis of summative results which are used as the basis for future learning planning. The results of an interview with Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMK PGRI Karangampel which will be held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that *"The results of the summative evaluation are analyzed to find out the weaknesses of learning and are used as the basis for planning the next learning material and strategy."* The researcher concluded that summative in the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum functions as a reflection at the program level (macro reflection): not just a "score report", but a map of weaknesses that directs the improvement of material design, strategies, and the selection of assessment instruments so that learning objectives are further achieved in the next cycle.

Finally, the Merdeka Curriculum improves the quality of PAI learning through strengthening systematic assessment governance from the beginning of planning, so that the measurement of the achievement of learning objectives becomes more transparent and directed. Based on the results of an interview with Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that *"The principle of evaluation is ensured by preparing an evaluation plan from the beginning, using instruments that are in accordance with the learning objectives, conducting assessments on an ongoing basis, and using clear and transparent rubrics and assessment guidelines."* The researcher's analysis confirms that the linkage between learning objectives–instruments–rubrics–follow-up is a core contribution of the Merdeka Curriculum: the quality of learning

increases because teachers' decisions (remedial, enrichment, method improvement) are based on learning evidence that is consistent and relevant to the set objectives.

### **3. Test and Non-Test Techniques in the Cognitive Domain: Emphasis on Conceptual Understanding and Instrument Practicality**

The cognitive domain assessment was carried out by combining written tests, oral tests, and assignments to measure understanding of PAI concepts. Based on the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that *"Assessment is carried out through written tests, oral tests, and assignments that measure understanding of PAI concepts."* These findings show that cognitive is not assessed in one way, but uses a variety of techniques so that evidence of student understanding can be read from written answers, oral explanations, to assignment products.

In choosing and designing cognitive instruments, teachers consider technical factors related to implementation in vocational school classrooms. Based on the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that *"Other criteria include practicality, readability, suitability with the characteristics of students, and efficiency of implementation time."* The researcher's analysis shows that the context of vocational schools (busy schedules, variations in students' abilities) encourages cognitive instruments to be composed not only "conceptually good", but also "feasible" without sacrificing measurement quality.

To maintain the quality of the instruments, teachers strengthen the aspects of validity and reliability through the conformity of items with learning indicators. Based on the results of interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that, *"The validity test was carried out through expert review and the suitability of the question items with learning indicators. Reliability is seen from the consistency of assessment results, especially in written test instruments."* These findings confirm that cognitive assessment is not just about "holding questions", but ensuring the measurability of achievement through clear indicators and consistency of assessment results.

In the Merdeka Curriculum, cognitive evaluation is also not separated from the character and orientation of learning which emphasizes more process. Based on the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that *"The main difference lies in the emphasis on formative assessment and character strengthening."* The researcher considers this statement to show that although the cognitive realm is still important, the assessment is directed to be in harmony with the strengthening of religious character, so that the cognitive does not stand alone but supports the formation of religious attitudes and skills.

#### **4. Assessment of the Affective and Psychomotor Domains: Instruments, Objectivity, and the Integration of the Three Domains**

Affective domain assessment is carried out continuously with observation techniques and attitude documentation, as well as the involvement of self-assessment and peer-to-peer assessment. Based on the results of interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMK PGRI Karangampel which will be held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that *"The affective domain is assessed through observation, attitude journals, self-assessment, and peer-to-peer assessments that are carried out on an ongoing basis."* These findings indicate that affective evidence is not taken from a single moment, but rather collected from a series of student behaviors throughout the learning process, so that attitude assessments have a stronger basis for observation.

The main difficulty arises in the aspect of attitude visibility and the potential for subjective bias, so teachers reinforce objectivity with rubrics and repetitive notes. Based on the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that *"The affective domain is the most difficult to assess because it is related to attitudes and behaviors that are not always seen directly."* Based on these findings, the researcher assessed that the affective challenge was not in the "lack of instruments", but in the character of the object being assessed, so that efforts to strengthen procedures (rubrics, systematic recording) were the key to reducing bias.

The strategy of objectivity is emphasized through the use of measurable criteria, clear rubrics, and the habit of systematic recording so that the results of the assessment do not depend on momentary impressions. Based on the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 at SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that, *"Teachers ensure objectivity by using assessment rubrics, measurable criteria, and systematic recording. In addition, attitude assessments are carried out repeatedly so as not to be influenced by subjective factors."* The researcher analyzed that this practice is a form of authentic assessment quality control, as it narrows the space for intuition-based assessment and enlarges the space for evidence-based assessment. In the psychomotor realm, assessment is carried out through the performance of worship practices and other performative skills with an assessment rubric. Based on the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that, *"The assessment is carried out through performance tests such as the practice of ablution, prayer, and reading the Qur'an using the assessment rubric."* These findings show a strong authentic orientation, as students are judged by the ability to perform in real terms, not just explain procedures theoretically.

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The integration of the three domains (cognitive-affective-psychomotor) is most evident in the learning of worship practices which at the same time gives evidence of knowledge, attitudes, and skills in a series of activities. Based on the results of an interview with an Islamic Religious Education teacher at SMK PGRI Karangampel which was held in July 2025 in the school environment of SMK PGRI Karangampel, information was obtained that, *"Integration is carried out through learning worship practices that at the same time assess students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills."* The researcher's analysis concludes that this integration strengthens the integrity of authentic assessment: one activity produces evidence across domains, so that the picture of student learning outcomes becomes more holistic and in line with the character of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The findings of the study show that the Merdeka Curriculum plays a real role in improving the quality of PAI learning through strengthening formative assessments as a "driver" for continuous learning improvement. In the field, teachers use formative assessments to monitor the learning process, provide feedback, and conduct remedial and enrichment so that learning is more adaptive to the needs of students. This pattern is in line with the direction of official policies that affirm the paradigm shift in assessment: *"educators are expected to focus more on formative assessments than summatives"*. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021) Thus, the quality of PAI learning is no longer determined by final grades alone, but by a continuous cycle of improvement from one meeting to the next.

In terms of feedback, the results of the study show that the Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to convey feedback that is constructive, specific, and encourages improvement (not just labeling it right and wrong). This practice is important because feedback is a bridge between assessment results and changes in students' learning strategies. In the literature on formative assessment, Wiliam emphasizes that *"Feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work"*. (Dylan Wiliam & Paul Black, 1998) This means that effective feedback is one that directs students to understand the quality of their work and concrete improvement steps in line with field findings that feedback is given to encourage improvement in learning outcomes and religious attitudes.

The Merdeka Curriculum also strengthens the measurement of the achievement of learning objectives because assessments are designed to be more aligned with objectives/indicators and supported by clearer rubrics. Field findings show that there are efforts to maintain objectivity through rubrics, assessment guidelines, and systematic recording, especially in the affective and psychomotor domains. This consistency makes the achievement of learning objectives more measurable and accountable, because assessment data does not stand alone as a number, but is evidence of competency development that is connected to learning objectives and learning follow-up.

In terms of the breadth of the scope of achievements, the results of the study confirm that the Merdeka Curriculum strengthens authentic assessments that integrate the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains through worship practice activities and

learning performance. These findings are in line with previous research that emphasized that authentic assessments assess all three domains in their entirety; For example, research states that (F. Hasanah et al., 2024) "*this authentic assessment will reveal both its cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects*". Thus, the contribution of the Merdeka Curriculum to the quality of PAI learning is seen in strengthening the integrity of achievements: students not only "understand concepts", but also show religious attitudes and skills in real practice.

However, this study also shows implementation challenges, especially in affective and psychomotor assessments that require continuous observation, sufficient time, and non-test instrument design skills. These findings are consistent with research that (Ramadhani & Ihsan, 2025) says "*affective and psychomotor assessments are more difficult to measure because they are subjective in nature*". This means that the Merdeka Curriculum opens up opportunities for quality improvement, but its success is highly dependent on the capacity of teachers (rubrics, anecdotal notes, observations), the availability of time, and the support of the school system so that assessments do not turn into an administrative burden.

The practical implication of these findings is the need to strengthen feedback design as a mandatory part of PAI's formative assessment: teachers need to standardize specific feedback habits (what is already good, what needs to be improved, and next steps to improve) in order for assessment to truly change student learning behavior. In addition, schools can facilitate a bank of rubrics and examples of authentic instruments (attitude observations, journals, worship practice demonstrations) that are easy to use across classes, so that objectivity increases and recap time is more efficient. The use of simple digital tools (rubric recaps, attitude journals, portfolios) is also important to reduce the burden of manual recording and maintain the consistency of assessment data.

The next implication is targeting learning management because the main constraint is the time and complexity of non-test assessments, schools need to organize the rhythm of assessment to be realistic (e.g. scheduling rotating demonstrations, key moment-based observations, and involvement of self/peer-to-peer assessments with rubrics) so that affective-psychomotor evidence is collected without sacrificing the quality of learning. With this kind of support, the Merdeka Curriculum not only "advocates formative assessments", but changes the PAI learning procedures to be more measurable, reflective, and improvement-oriented.

The limitation of this study lies in the scope of study locations that focus on one educational unit, so that the variation in the practice of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in other vocational schools (with different school cultures, internal policies, and resources) has not been adequately represented. In addition, because the main data is sourced from interviews and learning documents, the findings are highly dependent on the depth of the informant's reflection and the completeness of the available assessment administrative evidence, so that potential perception bias is still possible.

Another limitation is that the study has not photographed the impact longitudinally (for example, changes in the quality of assessment practices and student achievement

across semesters/years) or quantitatively linked changes in assessment to certain learning outcome indicators. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the location, enrich triangulation (e.g. repeated classroom observations, portfolio audits, or outcome development analysis), and test how the quality of formative feedback in PAI actually affects the improvement of learning objectives over time.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of authentic PAI assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational schools encompasses diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment functions, wherein cognitive measurement is conducted through written and oral tests and assignments, the affective domain through observation, attitude journals, self-assessment, and peer assessment, and the psychomotor domain through worship practice demonstrations and rubric-based performance assessments. The Merdeka Curriculum notably positions formative assessment and constructive feedback as the core of learning improvement, ensuring that assessment results serve as the basis for remedial and enrichment activities and the adjustment of teaching strategies, thereby making learning progress more visible and the achievement of learning objectives more measurable. However, as this study was limited to a single institution and relied heavily on interview and documentary data, its findings may not fully represent the diversity of implementation practices across vocational schools. Future research is therefore encouraged to expand the scope across multiple institutions, incorporate repeated classroom observations and in-depth portfolio analysis, and adopt a longitudinal design to capture changes in formative feedback quality and their long-term impact on PAI learning outcomes. At the practical and policy levels, these findings underscore the importance of strengthening teachers' capacity in authentic assessment design, developing rubric-based instrument banks, and securing sustained institutional support through continuous training and standardized evaluation systems.

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