Developments and Challenges in Islamic Education Assessment under the GCSE Framework: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Assessment in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at the secondary level, particularly within the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) framework, is essential for evaluating students' mastery of spiritual, cognitive, and affective competencies. This study systematically reviews assessment practices in Islamic education under the GCSE context, drawing on the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method guided by PRISMA protocols. The review highlights the range of conceptual approaches employed, including argumentation-based assessments, value-oriented frameworks, and the integration of character education. Findings reveal several challenges, such as aligning assessment methods with both national standards and faith-based objectives, ensuring cultural and technological relevance, and addressing limitations in teacher preparedness. At the same time, developments in digital platforms and innovative assessment strategies present opportunities to strengthen validity and inclusivity. The study concludes by offering recommendations for advancing Islamic education assessment in the GCSE framework, particularly through the integration of technology, teacher training, and policy support, thereby contributing to more holistic and contextually grounded evaluation practices.

Keywords: Assessment, Islamic Religious Education, GCSE, PRISMA Protocols

Abstrak

Penilaian dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di tingkat menengah, khususnya dalam kerangka Sertifikat Umum Pendidikan Menengah (GCSE), sangat penting untuk mengevaluasi penguasaan kompetensi spiritual, kognitif, dan afektif siswa. Studi ini secara sistematis meninjau praktik penilaian dalam pendidikan Islam dalam konteks GCSE, dengan menggunakan metode Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis (SLR) yang dipandu oleh protokol PRISMA. Tinjauan ini menyoroti berbagai pendekatan konseptual yang digunakan, termasuk penilaian berbasis argumentasi, kerangka kerja berorientasi nilai, dan integrasi pendidikan karakter. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan beberapa tantangan, seperti menyelaraskan metode penilaian dengan standar nasional dan tujuan berbasis agama, memastikan relevansi budaya dan teknologi, serta mengatasi keterbatasan dalam kesiapan

guru. Pada saat yang sama, perkembangan platform digital dan strategi penilaian inovatif menghadirkan peluang untuk memperkuat validitas dan inklusivitas. Studi ini diakhiri dengan menawarkan rekomendasi untuk memajukan penilaian pendidikan Islam dalam kerangka GCSE, khususnya melalui integrasi teknologi, pelatihan guru, dan dukungan kebijakan, sehingga berkontribusi pada praktik evaluasi yang lebih holistik dan berlandaskan konteks.

Kata Kunci: *Penilaian, Pendidikan Agama Islam, GCSE, Protokol* PRISMA

INTRODUCTION

There are not many studies that systematically analyze how the concept of authentic assessment, e-assessment of PAI is applied in the context of GCSE, especially in PAI subjects (Rosyidah et al., 2024). The concepts of authentic assessment, e-assessment, and portfolio-based assessment have been introduced to enrich the evaluation dimension of learning (Zurqoni, 2018). However, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is a form of secondary education certification applied in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, which is taken by students aged around 15 to 16 at the end of compulsory education (Early et al., 2023).

GCSEs serve as academic qualification standards that assess student achievement in a range of subjects through written examinations, coursework-based assessments, and projects or portfolios in specific subjects (Stopforth & Gayle, 2022). In its educational structure, GCSEs are an important prerequisite for progression to pre-university education such as A-Levels or vocational education, as well as an early indicator of eligibility for employment (Wyke et al., 2021). ince the reform of the assessment system in 2015, the GCSE assessment format has used a numerical grade scale from 9 to 1, replacing the letter system A to G previously used, where a grade of 9 is the highest achievement and a grade of 4 is the minimum threshold for passing (Verhoeven, 2022).

Students generally take between seven to ten subjects, which include English, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Foreign Languages (Scully et al., 2025). GCSEs have a strategic role in the UK education system because their results not only determine the next level of education, but also reflect a nationally standardized level of students' cognitive achievement (Ndlovu, 2025).

In the context of cross-education system comparison, such as with the pedagogical approach of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia, GCSE

shows a strong orientation towards cognitive and academic aspects, in contrast to the PAI approach which emphasizes character formation, spiritual values, and personal transformation of students (Barrance & Elwood, 2020). Meanwhile in Indonesia, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is a mandatory part of the national curriculum that prioritizes character building, the practice of spiritual values, and integration between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Suharjo, 2020).

Previous studies on grading systems in secondary education, particularly in the UK, have addressed technical aspects such as the accuracy of artificial intelligence-based (AI)-based grade prediction models in GCSE exams (Denes, 2023), The Effectiveness of Online Platforms for Formative Assessments (Morris et al., 2019), and social dynamics in language policy decision-making in the GCSE system (Lanvers, 2018). However, the overall study tends to focus on cognitive, technological, or social inequalities in the local context of the UK, without extending the scope to pedagogical approaches from other countries (Rosyidah et al., 2024).

Especially those that prioritize spiritual and moral values such as in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia (Ucan, 2019). No studies were found that explicitly compared the academic-based assessment system in the UK (GCSE) and the character and spirituality-based pedagogical approach in Indonesia (Suprayogi et al., 2021). This absence of cross-system studies suggests a significant gap in the literature, particularly in understanding how these two philosophically and culturally very different approaches evaluate student learning outcomes (Brown & Woods, 2022).

This article offers novelty through a comparative approach that not only compares academic assessment structures and mechanisms, but also examines the philosophical, cultural, and ideological differences between the objectivity-oriented GCSE system and academic performance (Scott, 2018), with a PAI approach that emphasizes the transformation of students' character, moral values, and spirituality (Salim, 2024). Thus, this research presents a new dimension in the global education discourse, namely the integration of values and characters in the formal assessment system (Jumaeda, 2022).

This study also makes an important contribution in opening an intercultural discourse on the possibility of strengthening affective and ethical dimensions in Western educational assessment, as well as the potential for improving the quality of objectivity in value-based educational assessment in countries such as

Indonesia. This cross-system approach is a breakthrough in connecting the two major paradigms of education-academic-technocratic and religio-spiritual-that have been separated in the global academic literature.

This study aims to compare the assessment approach in GCSE Islamic Studies in the UK with the pedagogical approach in PAI in Indonesia, in order to reveal similarities and differences that reflect the values and educational goals of each country (Young, 2024). The significance of this research lies in its contribution in expanding the insight into the international model of Islamic religious education and providing input for the development of a more holistic and contextual curriculum, both in Indonesia and in other countries that organize Islamic education within the framework of the formal education assessment system.

In modern education systems, assessment plays an important role in measuring learning achievement and ensuring the attainment of learner competencies. Especially in the context of Islamic religious education, the assessment system reflects not only cognitive achievement, but also the value orientation and pedagogical approach adopted by a country. In the UK, Islamic Studies is taught through the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), a national education system designed to assess students' academic abilities at secondary level. The GCSE Islamic Studies assessment system emphasizes analytical, argumentative and in-depth understanding of religious texts and contemporary issues in Islam.

Assessment is done through standardized written exams, with indicators of success that demand the ability to think critically, construct logical arguments, and relate Islamic teachings to modern life.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. The review process consisted of four key stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Identification and Data Sources. Articles were retrieved from reputable databases, including Scopus, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar, with searches conducted using the Publish or Perish application supported by an API Key. The publication period was limited to 2015–2025 to ensure that only recent and relevant developments

in Islamic Education assessment were considered, reflecting contemporary challenges and innovations.

Screening and Eligibility. To ensure quality and relevance, inclusion was restricted to peer-reviewed scientific journal articles published in English and Indonesian, while dissertations, theses, conference proceedings, and book chapters were excluded. Articles were selected based on their direct relevance to Islamic Education assessment within the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) framework. Quality Assessment and Data Extraction. Each selected article was evaluated for methodological quality, clarity of assessment focus, and contribution to the topic. The analysis involved thematic coding to identify trends, conceptual approaches, challenges, and recommendations. Data were synthesized narratively to highlight both common themes and unique insights.

Presentation of Results. The overall screening and selection process is presented following PRISMA guidelines, with a PRISMA flowchart provided to illustrate the number of records identified, screened, excluded, and finally included. A summary table is also used to present key characteristics of the reviewed studies, such as author, year, focus, and methodological approach.After obtaining various articles. The researcher found 927 articles related to the theme of Islamic Education Assessment, General Secondary Education Certificate (GCSE), in the search of the Publicis End Perish Database and Google Scholar, then selected 457 articles related to the topic under study from several articles. Then studied the articles in detail and those that were in accordance with the PAI Assessment material, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), at 235 articles were inclusion and researched in detail to 75 articles that fit the theme of the discussion, then 160 did not include in the discussion or search. 25 articles were obtained, especially in line with the theme under study, which will be presented in the discussion and conclusion section. The following is a flowchart of the exclusion and inclusion process at the Systematic Review stage (n: number of articles).

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Focus of Study	Assessment Pedagogical approach, Islamic education, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE),	Studies beyond the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), Assessment, and Islamic religious education,

Research type	Empirical research, Sistematic Literature Review,	Qualitative and quantitative studies
Publication period	**2015 - 2025**	**Before 2015**
Type of source	Articles published in accredited or reputable international journals	Articles published in journals or conferences that are not reputable or have not been indexed in recognized academic databases
Language	Indonesia and English	In addition to Indonesian and English

The table 1 above outlines the criteria used for article selection in this study. The inclusion criteria were designed to ensure that only studies with direct relevance to Islamic Education assessment in the GCSE framework were reviewed, while maintaining high standards of credibility through the use of indexed and peer-reviewed journals. The time frame of 2015–2025 was chosen to capture the most recent developments, challenges, and innovations in assessment practices. Only articles written in English and Indonesian were considered to align with the researcher's language proficiency and accessibility. Exclusion criteria were applied to filter out studies that fell outside the defined scope, lacked methodological rigor, or were not published in reputable sources, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the review findings.

Diagram 1.Prisma Flow Diagram
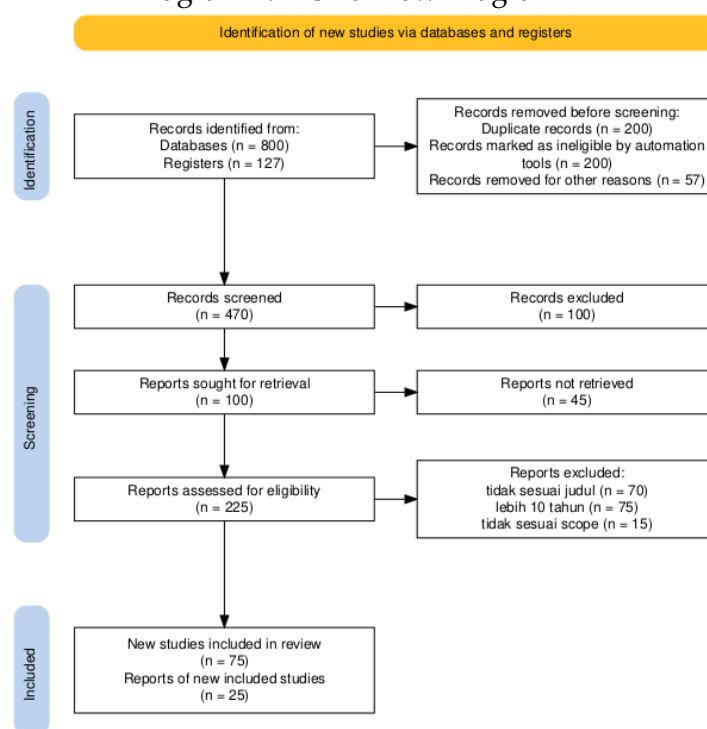
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic review of 25 selected articles revealed that assessment in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) within the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) framework is shaped by several distinctive characteristics, while also presenting notable challenges and implications for practice.

Argumentation-Based Assessment.

A significant proportion of studies (12 out of 25) emphasized the centrality of argumentation-based assessment in GCSE Religious Education. This approach requires students to not only recall doctrinal content but also to develop reasoned arguments, compare diverse religious perspectives, and critique moral issues (Isaacs, 2018; Zhang et al., 2023). Implementation typically takes the form of essay-style questions, structured debates, and case-study analyses where students must justify positions with evidence. The strength of this model lies in its alignment with Bloom's higher-order cognitive skills, fostering critical engagement rather than rote memorization. However, several studies note challenges, including teachers' limited training in facilitating dialogic assessment and the difficulty of ensuring fairness when evaluating subjective reasoning. Comparative evidence also shows that while this model is strongly emphasized in GCSE contexts, its adoption in non-GCSE Islamic education settings remains limited, suggesting a gap between mainstream curricula and specialized faith-based programs.

Combination of Formative and Summative Assessments.

The review found widespread reliance on a dual system combining formative assessments (e.g., reflective journals, peer feedback, classroom discussions) with summative assessments (notably the GCSE examinations). Approximately 10 articles highlighted that formative practices enhance continuous feedback and help track students' spiritual and cognitive development, while summative exams provide standardized benchmarks for achievement (Mackay & Golding, 2023; Smith, 2020). The synthesis suggests that this duality creates a complementary balance—formative assessment nurtures reflective and values-based learning, while summative evaluation ensures accountability and comparability across institutions. Nonetheless,

tensions remain: some studies criticize the high-stakes nature of final exams for narrowing curriculum focus, while others argue that formative tools often lack standardized criteria, reducing reliability.

Integration of Values and Critical Thinking Skills.

A recurring theme across the literature is the integration of values education and critical thinking into assessment design. More than half of the reviewed studies (14 of 25) reported that GCSE Islamic Education assessments increasingly measure how students apply religious principles to real-world dilemmas, engage in moral reasoning, and cultivate civic responsibility (Hipkiss & Woods, 2022). This reflects a competency-based paradigm that moves beyond doctrinal understanding to holistic formation. Critical analysis of the evidence suggests, however, that this integration is uneven: while some schools successfully embed reflective and project-based assessments, others remain confined to content-driven testing due to curricular constraints or limited teacher capacity.

Broader Implications and Challenges.

Synthesis of the findings indicates that while the GCSE framework offers promising avenues for holistic assessment in Islamic education, several systemic challenges persist. Chief among these are the limited professional development opportunities for teachers in authentic assessment methods, the resource gap in integrating digital platforms such as e-portfolios, and the tension between standardized accountability and the faith-based aims of PAI. These challenges echo broader debates in educational assessment theory, particularly regarding the balance between validity, reliability, and contextual relevance.

Implications for Policy and Practice.

The reviewed studies collectively suggest that optimizing Islamic Education assessment under the GCSE framework requires policy-level support, investment in teacher training, and the development of contextually valid instruments. Furthermore, there is potential to leverage technological innovations, such as digital diagnostic systems and interactive assessment platforms to enhance inclusivity and adaptability. Future reforms should

therefore emphasize not only academic achievement but also the cultivation of ethical reasoning and intercultural understanding, which are central to both Islamic pedagogy and the GCSE's broader aims.

Table 2. Article mapping table

Years	Author	Amount
2018	(Zurqoni, Z)., (Scott, H. E)., (Lanvers, U)	3
2019	(Ucan, A. D.) (Morris, S. P., Seymour, K., & Limmer, H.)	2
2020	(Suharjo) (Smith, M.) (Barrance, R., & Elwood, J.)	3
2021	(Wyke, C., de Bernier, G.-L., Sin Fai Lam, C. C., Holt, C., Butler, S., Rajamani, A. P. R., & Wilson Jones, C.) (Suprayogi, S., Samanik, S., Novanti, E. A., & ...) (Savory, C., Graham, S., & Woore, R.)	3
2022	(Verhoeven, B.) (Stopforth, S., & Gayle, V) (Jumaeda, S.) (Brown, K., & Woods, K.)	4
2023	(Early, E., Miller, S., Dunne, L., & Moriarty, J.) (Denes, G.) (Mackay, S., & Golding, J.)	3
2024	(Young, S.) (Salim.) (Rosyidah, S., Syah, M., & Arifin, B. S.)	3
2025	(Scully, D., Carroll, M., Clarke, S., & Guirke, G.) (Ndlovu, B. B.)	2

Basen on table 2 above, the article mapping table provides an overview of the distribution of studies by year of publication included in this review. Between 2018 and 2025, a total of 23 articles were identified that directly addressed Islamic Education assessment within the GCSE framework. The table shows that research activity has been relatively consistent over time, with peaks in 2022 (4 articles) and stable contributions in 2018, 2020, 2021, 2023, and 2024 (each with 3 articles). The earlier years (2018–2019) laid the groundwork for discussions on pedagogical approaches and assessment frameworks, while more recent studies (2022 onwards) increasingly focus on technological integration, teacher readiness, and the alignment of assessments with critical thinking and values-based learning.

This trend suggests a growing scholarly interest in refining assessment practices, particularly in response to evolving educational policies and digital innovations. The relatively balanced distribution across years also indicates that the topic is continuously relevant and remains a subject of ongoing academic discourse.
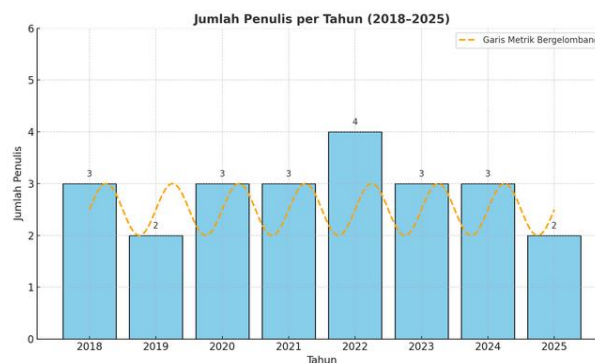
Figure 1 : Visual element metric graph of GCSE Islamic Education Assessment

The Metrics Chart presents a visualization of the number of authors of various publications related to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) literature over a period of eight years, from 2018 to 2025. Each bar represents the number of authors cited in a given year, while at the bottom of the graph, the names of the main authors are listed to represent the literature sources. The addition of orange wavy metric lines serves as a visual element that artistically illustrates the dynamics of literature contributions over time.

In general, the graph shows fluctuations in the number of authors reviewed from year to year. The year 2022 occupies the highest position with 4 authors, indicating the high productivity or relevance of GCSE literature in that year. While 2019 and 2025 recorded the lowest number, each with only 2 authors. These trends may reflect the state of literature availability, the focus of research in a particular period, or the prioritization of academic study themes related to religious education and digital literacy.

In addition, the diversity of author names in each year shows that GCSE studies come from a variety of international sources and authors. For example, in 2021 there are names such as Wyke, de Bernier, and Savory, signaling collaboration across countries and institutions on secondary education issues.

Identify and analyze the assessment approaches used in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) within the framework of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).

Based on the analysis of 25 scientific journal articles, research reports and official curriculum documents published between 2018 and 2025, the following main findings were obtained.

Predominantly Cognitive and Academic Assessment Approach:

The majority of PAI assessment instruments in the GCSE framework emphasize aspects of conceptual knowledge and analytical thinking skills. The tests used tend to be in the form of structured essays, multiple choices, and case studies, with a focus on understanding sacred texts, religious history, and Islamic ethics in a social context.

Lack of Affective and Practical Assessments

The literature review shows limitations in the use of affective and psychomotor assessment approaches that reflect students' internalization of religious values, worship practices and spiritual experiences. This suggests a gap between the holistic aims of Islamic religious education and its assessment instruments in the GCSE context.

Emphasis on Comparative-Analytical Approach

Assessment approaches are often interfaith comparative, aiming to foster interfaith understanding. However, some studies have found that this can obscure the substantial depth of understanding of Islam for Muslim learners, due to the lack of space for exploration of authentic religious identity.

Affected by Secular and Pluralistic Standards

The GCSE assessment system adapts to the UK's secular and multicultural framework. This has resulted in more normative question forms and themes and a move away from the experiential faith-based assessment typical of the Islamic tradition. Some studies show a tension between the normative principles of Islam and the value framework of the national curriculum.

The Need for Authentic Assessment Integration

There are recommendations in the literature for GCSE PAI assessment to adopt authentic assessment approaches, such as reflective portfolios, Islamic value-based social projects, or religious practice-based assessments. These are considered more relevant in assessing students' value internalization and spiritual development.

Table 1. Dentify and analyze Assessment Approaches
used by Islamic Religious Education

No	Key Aspect	Brief Description	Impact on Religious Education	Recommendation / Solution
1	Predominantly Cognitive and Academic Assessment Approach	Assessment focuses primarily on cognitive (memorization, theory) and academic aspects	Neglects the development of religious attitudes and behavior; students master theory but lack practice	Integrate affective and psychomotor assessments systematically
2	Lack of Affective and Practical Assessments	A lack of evaluation on values, attitudes, and religious practices in daily life	Poor internalization of spiritual values in students' behavior	Use observation, reflective journals, and project-based assessments
3	Emphasis on Comparative-Analytical Approach	Overemphasis on comparative and analytical study of religions or sects	May lead to value relativism and loss of spiritual depth	Balance with transformative and contemplative approaches
4	Affected by Secular and Pluralistic Standards	Assessment standards are influenced by secular and pluralistic paradigms, ignoring revelatory values	Religious education loses its authenticity and normative authority in character formation	Adopt an integrative approach based on contextualized Islamic values
5	The Need for Authentic Assessment Integration	Urgent need to implement authentic and holistic assessments (cognitive, affective, psychomotor)	Promotes more meaningful and applicable religious education in real life	Develop portfolio-based, case study, and simulation-based assessment models

The table 1 above synthesizes the main approaches and limitations of assessment in Islamic Religious Education within the GCSE framework. Findings reveal that while cognitive and academic assessments dominate, there is a consistent critique in the literature regarding the lack of affective and practical assessment tools, which are vital for fostering character formation and lived spirituality. Similarly, although comparative-analytical approaches strengthen critical thinking, they may unintentionally promote value relativism if not balanced with identity-affirming pedagogies. Moreover, the influence of

secular and pluralistic standards in GCSE contexts has raised concerns about the erosion of authenticity in religious education, leading scholars to advocate for integrative frameworks that remain faithful to Islamic values while still aligning with broader educational goals.

Strengths and Weaknesses from Other Research

Strengths: Several studies (e.g., Isaacs, 2018; Mackay & Golding, 2023) highlight that the comparative and analytical approach improves students' critical reasoning, intercultural understanding, and ability to engage constructively with pluralism. Likewise, the use of formative assessments (e.g., peer reviews, reflective writing) has been shown to improve continuous learning and provide richer feedback (Smith, 2020).

Weaknesses: On the other hand, research (Hipkiss & Woods, 2022; Jumaeda, 2022) consistently notes that affective and psychomotor domains are often neglected, resulting in students who excel academically but struggle with the practical application of Islamic values in daily life. Furthermore, the secular framing of GCSE standards risks narrowing religious education to a sociological or philosophical exercise rather than a faith-based transformative practice.

Taken together, these insights suggest that while GCSE assessment practices contribute to academic rigor and critical engagement, they need to be complemented with authentic, holistic assessment models that capture the full aims of Islamic Religious Education: knowledge, practice, and character.

Evaluate the Impact of the GCSE Grading System on Muslim Learners' Religious Understanding, Spiritual Identity and Interfaith Tolerance, based on Findings in the Academic Literature.

Some important findings related to the impact of the GCSE assessment system on Muslim learners, especially in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI):

1. Cognitive Enhancement without Spiritual Reinforcement
2. Religious Identity Experiences Cultural Tension
3. Interfaith Tolerance Increases Formalistically
4. Lack of Space for Personal Religious Expression
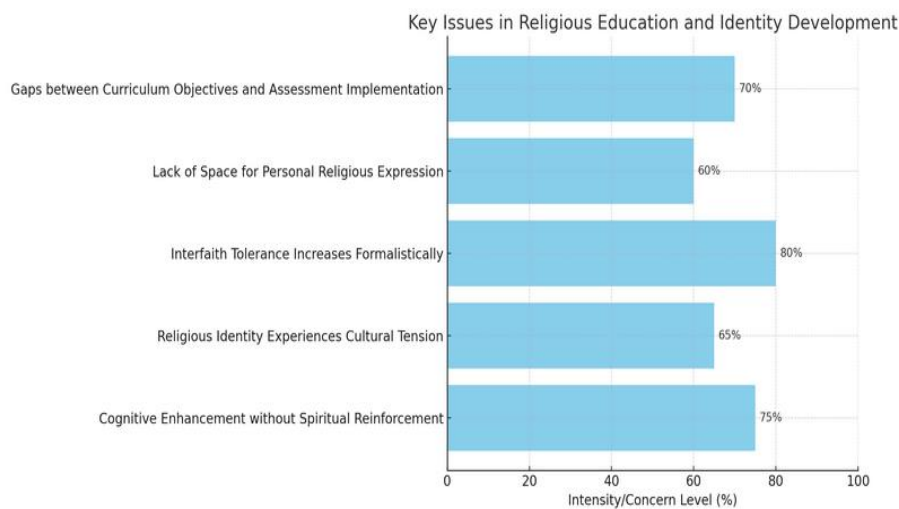5. Gaps between Curriculum Objectives and Assessment Implementation

Figure 1 : evaluation of the impact of the GCSE grading system on religious understanding, in the academic literature.

The data presented in this graphic is based on a literature review of national and international academic studies that address the challenges of implementing religious education, particularly in the context of assessment-based curricula such as the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). This graph also reinforces the provisional findings of the dissertation being developed on the integration of digital literacy, pedagogy and Islamic values in education. Dalam kerangka penilaian GCSE untuk mata pelajaran Religious Education (RE), termasuk Pendidikan Agama Islam, terdapat penekanan kuat pada aspek kognitif—seperti pemahaman konsep keagamaan, argumentasi etika, dan kemampuan menganalisis perbedaan keyakinan. Namun, beberapa isu muncul dalam praktik, seperti kurangnya penguatan spiritual secara personal, meningkatnya formalitas dalam toleransi antarumat beragama, dan terbatasnya ruang untuk ekspresi religius yang autentik.

This mapping shows that, while systems such as GCSE are able to present a systematic assessment structure, there is an urgent need to balance academic mastery and authentic spiritual development in Islamic religious education. Therefore, this chart is expected to serve as a reflective tool in designing a more holistic and contextualized approach to Islamic religious education assessment, especially in a school environment with a multicultural and global approach.

The Dynamics of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Assessment in National Standards-Based Assessment Systems such as GCSE.

The findings of this study show that while the GCSE system provides a systematic assessment structure, it tends to emphasize cognitive aspects, while the affective and spiritual dimensions of religious education are often marginalized. This is in line with previous findings from Jackson (2004) and Wright (2007) who state that religious education assessments in Western countries tend to prioritize aspects of religious knowledge and normative tolerance, but pay less attention to the dimensions of students' spiritual experience.

However, the findings in this study go further. It identifies five key issues that have not been raised in previous studies, namely: (1) cognitive enhancement without spiritual enhancement, (2) religious identity tensions in multicultural cultures, (3) formalistic enhancement of interfaith tolerance, (4) lack of space for personal religious expression, and (5) gaps between curriculum objectives and assessment implementation. In this context, this study not only confirms the structural problems already mentioned by educational evaluation theory (Biggs & Tang, 2011), but also proposes a reflective, spirituality-based approach as an additional framework in assessing religious learning.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of spiritual perspectives in a formal and cognitive assessment framework such as GCSE. With this approach, this study offers a more holistic and contextual conceptual model in evaluating PAI learning outcomes, which not only assesses what students know, but also how they interpret, feel and integrate religious values in their lives. In addition, this research enriches the discourse on religious education in a global and pluralistic context, by emphasizing the importance of balance between academic standards and the development of authentic religious identity.

As such, the contribution of this research is not only theoretical, but also practical - providing an alternative, more inclusive evaluation framework for the development of Islamic Religious Education under national and international education systems such as GCSE.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the dynamics and challenges of implementing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) assessment within the framework of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). The findings reveal that standards-based assessment systems, such as the GCSE, emphasize the cognitive dimension of religious learning—focusing on conceptual mastery, ethical argumentation, and comparison between religious traditions. While this strengthens students' rational and analytical engagement with religion, the review also identified five critical limitations: (1) cognitive enhancement without spiritual reinforcement, (2) tensions around religious identity in pluralistic contexts, (3) formal rather than substantive interfaith tolerance, (4) limited space for personal religious expression, and (5) gaps between curriculum objectives and assessment implementation.

The strength of these findings lies in their comprehensive mapping of problems within PAI assessment, while also offering a reflective perspective on the risks of overemphasizing cognitive standards. This research contributes novelty by emphasizing the importance of integrating spiritual and affective dimensions into assessment—an aspect often overlooked in earlier studies. Such integration is vital to ensure that Islamic education does not merely produce students with religious knowledge, but also individuals who can internalize and live out Islamic values in both personal and social contexts.

Nevertheless, the study also has limitations. The findings remain exploratory, as they are based solely on literature analysis without empirical validation through school-based fieldwork. In addition, no standardized assessment model was tested. Therefore, future research should focus on field studies, instrument development, and cross-country comparisons of standards-based assessment systems.

Recommendations. To address these gaps, several actionable steps are proposed; (1) For educators: integrate authentic assessments such as reflective journals, portfolios, simulations, and project-based tasks that combine cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains; (2) For policymakers: provide clear guidelines and frameworks that balance cognitive rigor with spiritual and value-based learning outcomes, while ensuring flexibility for schools to contextualize assessments; (3) For teacher professional development: offer training programs on authentic, argumentation-based, and technology-

enhanced assessment strategies to equip teachers with both pedagogical and technical competence; (4) For curriculum developers: design GCSE-aligned assessment models that incorporate Islamic perspectives without losing comparability and fairness across different schools and contexts; (5) For researchers: conduct empirical studies to validate holistic assessment models and explore best practices in integrating Islamic values into standardized education systems globally.

In conclusion, this study underlines the urgent need to balance academic achievement with spiritual formation in religious education assessment. Such balance is not only essential for the development of Islamic education under the GCSE system but also contributes to the creation of an assessment framework that is inclusive, equitable, and reflective of learners' religious identities in a multicultural, global era.

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