

## Revealing the Practice of Norm-referenced Assessment and Criterion-referenced Assessment in Islamic Education Learning

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**Abstract: Revealing the Practice of Norm-referenced Assessment and Criterion-referenced Assessment in Islamic Education Learning**

**Objective:** This study aims to reveal and analyze the application of Norm-Referenced Assessment (NRA) and Criterion-Referenced Assessment (CRA) in Islamic education. **Methods:** This research uses descriptive qualitative methods, data collection using observation, interviews, and documentation studies. Data analysis uses reduction, presentation, and conclusion techniques. **Results:** Islamic education teachers at SMPN 24 Padang have applied norm-referenced assessment in the learning process and criterion-referenced assessment in certain aspects, such as attitude and skills assessment. **Conclusion:** While both can improve academic understanding, there is still a need to integrate these two assessment methods with a more holistic approach that measures cognitive ability and develops students' Islamic character. **Contribution:** The research improves the quality of Islamic education learning assessment according to the demands of the applicable curriculum.

**Keyword:** Norm-referenced Assessment, Assessment Practices, Islamic education

**Abstrak: Mengungkap Praktik Penilaian Acuan Norma dan Penilaian Acuan Kriteria dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam**

**Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap dan menganalisis penerapan Norm-Referenced Assessment (NRA) dan Criterion-Referenced Assessment (CRA) dalam konteks pendidikan Islam. **Metode:** Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif, pengumpulan data menggunakan observasi, wawancara dan studi dokumentasi. Analisis data menggunakan teknik reduksi, penyajian dan penarikan kesimpulan. **Hasil:** Guru pendidikan agama islam di SMPN 24 Padang telah menerapkan penilaian acuan norma dalam proses pembelajaran dan menerapkan penilaian acuan kriteria pada aspek tertentu seperti penilaian sikap dan keterampilan. **Kesimpulan:** Meskipun keduanya dapat meningkatkan pemahaman akademis, namun masih ada kebutuhan untuk mengintegrasikan kedua metode penilaian ini dengan pendekatan yang lebih holistik, yang tidak hanya mengukur kemampuan kognitif, tetapi juga mengembangkan karakter Islam siswa. **Kontribusi:** Penelitian berkontribusi sebagai bahan pertimbangan dalam upaya meningkatkan kualitas penilaian pembelajaran pendidikan agama islam sesuai dengan tuntutan kurikulum yang berlaku.

**Kata Kunci:** Penilaian Acuan Norma, Praktik Penilaian, Pendidikan Agama Islam

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Assessment is an important component in the learning process that aims to measure the achievement of learner competencies. Assessment not only evaluates learner learning outcomes but also provides feedback for educators to improve the learning process (Wei et al., 2021). Therefore, the assessment approaches and techniques used must be based on the learning objectives and characteristics of the learners (Hwang & Chang, 2011). One commonly used assessment approach is norm-referenced assessment. The norm-referenced assessment compares learners' achievements with those of a group or class (Frans et al., 2017). This approach is often used in assessing cognitive learning outcomes, such as end-of-semester or national exams. The advantage of norm-referenced assessment is the ease of ranking students and comparing students' achievements with their classmates.

On the other hand, norm-referenced assessment also has a weakness: it does not provide sufficient information about the mastery of competencies that learners should achieve. Norm-referenced assessment only measures the relative ability of learners compared to their classmates, not the mastery of competencies that should be achieved (Mindell et al., 2019). This can lead to errors in determining the quality of learning and achieving educational goals (Popham, 2011). In line with the curriculum development in Indonesia, criterion-referenced assessment is recommended to be applied in the learning process. Criterion-referenced assessment emphasizes mastery of predetermined competencies, not comparison with classmates' achievements (Coombs et al., 2020). In criterion-referenced assessment, learners are considered passed or competent if they have achieved the criteria set out in the learning objectives.

The application of criterion-referenced assessment in learning is expected to provide more accurate information about the achievement of learner competencies (Brantmeier et al., 2012). This is in line with the principles of assessment in the curriculum, which emphasizes competency-based assessment (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). However, in its implementation, many educators still apply norm-referenced assessment in the learning process, especially in the assessment of cognitive learning outcomes.

Several previous studies have revealed the practice of norm-referenced assessment at various levels of education (Coker et al., 2018). Many educators still apply norm-referenced assessment in assessing learning outcomes, even though criterion-referenced assessment has been recommended in the curriculum. Meanwhile, research conducted by Klapp (2019) revealed that educators still have difficulties developing criteria-referenced assessment instruments based on the curriculum's demands. In learning Islamic education, research on assessment practices is still limited. Research conducted by Farmer (2023) revealed that Islamic education educators in several schools still apply norm-referenced assessments in assessing cognitive learning outcomes. However, the study did not explain the assessment practices carried out by Islamic education Educators, especially at SMPN 24 Padang.

Assessment is an important aspect of the learning process, including in Islamic education, where evaluating students' knowledge, skills, and Islamic values is part of the main objectives (Ashaari et al., 2012). Two assessment approaches commonly used in education are Norm-Referenced Assessment (NRA) and Criterion-Referenced Assessment (CRA). NRA assesses a student's ability by comparing it to the results of a peer group, while CRA measures individual achievement based on predetermined standards or criteria. These approaches have different implications for student evaluation, curriculum design, and overall learning outcomes.

In Islamic education, assessment methods should be aligned with academic and spiritual goals (Attard et al., 2019). However, there is still a gap in understanding how NRA and CRA are applied in Islamic learning, especially regarding their effectiveness, challenges, and impact on student development. Most previous research has focused on assessment systems

in general education, so there are limited studies that specifically explore the practice of these two methods in the context of Islamic education.

Research on Norm-Referenced Assessment (NRA) and Criterion-Referenced Assessment (CRA) in education has been widely studied in general education, especially regarding their effectiveness in measuring student achievement and improving learning quality. NRA is used to compare student learning outcomes with peer groups (Anjar et al., 2018; Sulisty, 2016; Mardapi & Herawan, 2017; Supriyanto, 2018), while CRA assesses individual achievement based on certain standards (Pangastuti & Munfa'ati, 2018; Alfath, 2019; Sriyanto, 2019; Sa'I & Anwar, 2023). In Islamic education, studies on learning evaluation still focus more on Islamic values-based assessment without an in-depth exploration of the application of NRA and CRA in learning practices.

There is a gap in the results of previous research, which focuses more on the concept of educational evaluation in general without an in-depth exploration of the implementation of these two methods in the context of Islamic learning. In addition, not many empirical studies compare the effectiveness of NRA and CRA in improving students' academic understanding and character building, nor have they identified the challenges educators face in implementing these methods. Therefore, this research offers novelty by uncovering the real practice of using NRA and CRA in Islamic education through an empirical approach, analyzing their impact on student learning outcomes, and exploring the challenges and solutions in their application. With a case study-based approach, this research contributes to developing more relevant evaluation strategies aligned with Islamic values, thus enriching the knowledge of assessment methods in Islamic education in the modern era.

## B. METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to reveal the practice of norm-referenced assessment in Islamic education learning at SMPN 24 Padang. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research seeks to deeply understand the phenomenon through data collection from a natural environment by utilizing the researcher as the key instrument. The samples in this study were Islamic education educators and students at SMPN 24 Padang.

This research was conducted starting on May 07, 2024, starting with observation activities to observe the real conditions in the field. Data collection techniques used include observation, in-depth interviews, and document studies. Observations were made during the learning process of Islamic education in the classroom to observe the assessment practices carried out by educators. In-depth interviews were conducted with Islamic education educators, school principals, and students to explore information about perceptions, experiences, and challenges in implementing assessment. Document studies were conducted on learning tools such as lesson plans and assessment instruments used by educators.

Data analysis was conducted continuously during and after data collection using data reduction, presentation, and conclusion-drawing techniques. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and methods and member checking to ensure the accuracy of research findings. This research also considers ethical aspects, such as participant consent, data confidentiality, and not harming any party.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### 1. The Norm-referenced Assessment Practices in Cognitive Learning Outcomes Assessment

The results showed that most Islamic education educators at SMPN 24 Padang still apply norm-referenced assessments in assessing cognitive learning outcomes, such as midterm and final exams. This can be seen using a normal curve or normal distribution to determine

students' final grades. Based on interviews with Islamic education educators, the normal curve is considered more fair and objective because it can show the position of students compared to their classmates. The following interview excerpt reinforces this finding:

*"I use the normal curve in determining students' final grades. So, after I get the students' raw scores, I group the scores into a normal curve. For example, the top 10% get an A, the bottom 20% get a B, and so on. This method is considered fairer because it shows the learners' position compared to their peers. Using the normal curve, this assessment method is more fair and objective than other methods. The reason is that the grades obtained by students depend not only on their abilities but also on their position among their classmates. So learners can see where they stand in the class. For example, a learner may have a fairly high score individually, but if most of his/her peers also have high scores, then the learner will only rank in the middle. Conversely, if a learner has a moderate grade but most of his/her friends get lower grades, then the learner will be ranked higher in the class."* Islamic Religion Teacher Class IX, 2024).

This finding is in line with research conducted by XXX, which shows that there are still many educators who apply norm-referenced assessment in assessing learning outcomes, even though criterion-referenced assessment has been recommended in the curriculum. The application of norm-referenced assessment in assessing cognitive learning outcomes has several consequences, namely:

- a. Learners who have good mastery of competencies do not necessarily get good grades if the achievements of their classmates are also good. Conversely, learners who have poor mastery of competencies can get good grades if the achievements of their classmates are also not good. This can lead to errors in determining the achievement of learner competencies.
- b. Norm-referenced assessment can lead to unhealthy competition among learners. Learners tend to focus more on ranking than mastery of competencies. This can impact decreasing learner motivation, especially for learners with below-average abilities (Popham, 2011).
- c. Norm-referenced assessment does not provide enough information about the aspects of competence that students have not mastered. Educators only know the ranking of students without knowing in detail what competencies have not been mastered. This can make it difficult for educators to provide follow-up or remediation according to the needs of students.

## 2. The Criterion-based Assessment Practices in Attitude and Skills Assessment

Although most Islamic education Educators at SMPN 24 Padang still apply norm-referenced assessment in assessing cognitive learning outcomes, some educators have begun applying criterion-referenced assessment to assess attitudes and skills. This is due to the demands of the applicable curriculum and the principles of assessment in the curriculum, which emphasize competency-based assessment (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). In assessing attitudes, Islamic education educators use criteria or indicators determined in the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP). For example, for the discipline aspect, educators have criteria such as arriving on time, collecting assignments on time, etc. Students who meet these criteria will get a score according to the predetermined criteria. The following interview excerpt illustrates the practice of criterion-referenced assessment in attitude assessment:

*"For attitude assessment, I use the criteria set in the lesson plan. For example, for the discipline aspect, I have criteria such as coming on time, submitting assignments on time, and so on. Students who meet these criteria will get a score according to the predetermined criteria. In assessing students' attitudes, I always refer to the criteria previously set in the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP). For the discipline aspect, I set several criteria, such as coming to class on time, submitting assignments on time, participating in learning from beginning to end, and so on. I design these criteria in such a way that they can be observed and measured. During the learning process, I will observe and record the attitude of each learner regarding fulfilling these criteria. Suppose a learner can fulfill all the criteria*

set for the attitude of discipline. In that case, he will get the maximum score on that aspect" (Islamic Religion teacher Class VIII, 2024).

Meanwhile, Islamic education educators also use predetermined criteria or assessment rubrics to assess skills. For example, in assessing Al-Quran reading skills, Educators use criteria such as fluency, tajweed, and makharijul letter. Each criterion is given a certain score, and the total score of all criteria determines students' final score in the skills assessment. The application of criterion-referenced assessment in attitude and skills assessment has several advantages, namely:

- a. This assessment provides more accurate information about learners' competency achievement. Educators can find out in detail what competencies have been mastered and have not been mastered by students. This makes it easier for educators to provide follow-up or remediation according to the needs of students.
- b. Criterion-referenced assessment encourages learners to focus on mastery of competencies, not competition with classmates. Learners are no longer trapped in unhealthy competition but strive to achieve predetermined criteria or standards.

Criterion-referenced assessment is more in line with the principles of assessment in the curriculum, which emphasizes competency-based assessment. This is in line with the objectives of national education, which are oriented towards achieving learner competencies.

### 3. Factors Affecting Assessment Practices

Based on the research results, several factors influence the assessment practices carried out by Islamic education educators at SMPN 24 Padang, namely:

- a. Factors of habit or tradition of assessment. Most Islamic education educators are accustomed to using norm-referenced assessments in assessing cognitive learning outcomes, making it difficult to change these assessment practices.
- b. Educators' perceptions of assessment fairness. Some Islamic education educators think norm-referenced assessment is fairer because it compares students' achievements with their classmates. They consider criterion-referenced assessment unfair because all learners can achieve the highest score if they meet the set criteria.
- c. The factor of educators' understanding of criterion-referenced assessment. Some Islamic education educators admitted that they still did not deeply understand the concept and implementation of criterion-referenced assessment. This causes them to find it difficult to develop criterion-referenced assessment instruments that are by the demands of the curriculum. This finding aligns with Pui (2021), which revealed that educators still have difficulties developing criterion-referenced assessment instruments. The following interview excerpt illustrates this condition:

*"I've tried to make a criteria-referenced assessment instrument, but I'm still confused about how to determine it appropriately. The criteria must be specific and measurable, making it difficult for me. However, in the process, I still feel confused about determining the right criteria to use as a reference for assessment. This makes it difficult for me; I want to make an instrument to assess students' Quran reading skills. I have to set clear and measurable criteria such as fluency, accuracy of tajweed, makharijul letter, and so on. Determining these criteria with clear and measurable indicators is quite difficult for me. I am worried that if the criteria I set are not specific enough or too subjective, the assessment I do later will also not be accurate and objective, thus not achieving the purpose of the criterion-referenced assessment itself. I hope the school or education office can provide special training on this matter so that we educators can correctly understand and apply criterion-referenced assessment" (Grade IX Islamic Religion Teacher, 2024).*

- d. Factors of time availability and educator workload. Some Islamic education educators complained about the limited time to develop comprehensive criterion-referenced assessment instruments. In addition, the high workload of teaching and administration is also an obstacle for educators in developing assessment instruments based on the

principles of competency-based assessment. This was expressed by one of the Islamic education educators:

*"I want to develop a better criterion-referenced assessment instrument, but time is limited. Besides teaching, we also have to take care of many administration and other tasks from the school. Developing a good criterion-referenced assessment instrument is not easy. It takes time, thoroughness, and careful thought to set specific and measurable criteria for assessing each competency. Unfortunately, with the many other tasks and responsibilities we have to carry out, this time is very limited. For example, I want to develop an assessment instrument for the competency of writing simple essays in Islamic education subjects. I had to think about and formulate clear and measurable criteria. This process requires a lot of time and concentration. However, after teaching all day, I still have to complete various administrative tasks such as preparing lesson plans, filling out teaching journals, correcting students' work, and other tasks from school. Thus, the time left to develop assessment instruments is very limited. If our workload is more focused on teaching and preparing learning tools, we will have more time for other things, such as developing good assessment instruments"* (Grade VIII Islamic Religion Teacher, 2024).

- e. Support factors from the school and education office. The lack of training and mentoring on criterion-referenced assessment from schools and education offices also influences educators' assessment practices. Some educators admitted that they had never received special training on criterion-referenced assessment. One educator said:

*"So far, we have never received special training on criterion-referenced assessment from the school or the education office. Maybe this is why we are still confused about implementing it. We only received a general explanation of the criteria-based assessment during the socialization of the new curriculum. However, the explanation was still very limited and did not touch on the practical level of developing appropriate assessment instruments. Meanwhile, in the educator professional education and training that we have attended, the material on learning assessment also still does not mention much about the concept of criterion-referenced assessment. Most still dwell on the norm-referenced assessment that has been commonly applied. With adequate support, I am sure that educators will be better prepared and able to apply criterion-referenced assessment by the curriculum demands."* Islamic Religion Teacher, Class VII, 2024)

- f. In addition to the factors previously mentioned, other factors influence the assessment practices of Islamic education Educators at SMPN 24 Padang, namely the educators' educational background and teaching experience. Most Islamic education educators have educational backgrounds in Islamic education (Pendidikan Agama Islam) or Tarbiyah. However, only a few have gained specific knowledge and training on learning assessment during their formal education. One senior Islamic education educator revealed this:

*"When we were in college, we didn't get too many courses on learning assessment. Most courses focused more on religious and educational material. So, our knowledge of assessment, especially criterion-referenced assessment, was limited. We learned more about the Islamic education material itself, teaching methods, classroom management, and other things related to teaching. However, our knowledge of assessment, especially criterion-referenced assessment, which is relatively new, is still very limited. In the past, we were only taught a little about norm-referenced assessment or PAP (Benchmark Assessment), which was already commonly applied then. However, we haven't learned much about criterion-referenced assessment, which is now recommended in the latest curriculum. I tried to find information from various sources, such as books and the internet and shared it with other educators. Although it is still not optimal, at least I am not silent. With adequate knowledge, prospective educators will be better prepared to apply various assessment models by the demands of the applicable curriculum"* (Islamic Religion Teacher, Class IX, 2024).

- g. Teaching experience also influences educators' assessment practices. Educators who have been teaching for a long time find it more difficult to change the assessment patterns they have been applying. They are used to norm-referenced assessment and find it difficult to switch to criterion-referenced assessment. One senior Islamic Religion teacher revealed:

*"I have been teaching for over 20 years and using norm-referenced assessment. It feels difficult to change that habit, especially at my age, which is no longer young. I realized that it was time for me to adjust to the demands of the times. Criterion-referenced assessment is more suitable for objectively measuring students' competency achievement. We need a deeper understanding of the concept and implementation of criteria-based assessment.*

*We are looking forward to practical training and workshops. With intensive assistance, even senior educators will eventually be able to adapt and implement criteria-based assessments better. Of course, this is to improve our students' assessment and learning quality"* (Grade IX Islamic Religion Teacher, 2024).

Meanwhile, younger and newer educators tend to be more open to changes and innovations in learning assessment. They more easily accept and adopt the concept of criterion-referenced assessment, although it still requires adequate training and assistance. This finding is in line with research conducted by Choi et al. (2018), which revealed that educators' educational background and teaching experience are important factors that influence assessment practices in the field. Educators who have adequate knowledge and training in assessment are more able to implement criterion-referenced assessment well.

#### 4. Learners' Perceptions of Assessment Practices

In addition to examining perceptions and assessment practices from the educators' perspective, this study also explores students' perceptions of assessment practices applied by Islamic education educators at SMPN 24 Padang. This is important considering that students are the subjects who directly feel the impact of the applied assessment practices. The results of interviews with several students show that most students prefer criterion-referenced assessment over norm-referenced assessment. They feel that criterion-referenced assessment is fairer and provides equal opportunities for each learner to achieve the highest score. The following is an excerpt from an interview with one of the learners:

*"I prefer it when teachers use criterion-referenced assessment. That way, my grade does not depend on the achievements of other friends. If I can meet the set criteria, I can get the highest grade, and I feel that criterion-referenced assessment motivates me to study harder because what is assessed is my achievement against clear criteria; I feel more motivated to master the material and the expected competencies. I don't have to worry about the achievements of other friends who could be better than me. The most important thing is that I can achieve the criteria optimally. This encourages me to study harder and improve my understanding. For example, in the assessment of Al-Qur'an reading skills, if I can meet the criteria such as fluency, tajweed accuracy, and makharijul letter set by the educator, I can get the maximum score for that skill. This is different from the norm-referenced assessment that compares me with the achievements of my classmates. With the criterion-referenced assessment, I don't have to worry anymore if my friends have better abilities in reading the Qur'an. The most important thing is that I can meet the criteria set by the educator. The same applies to assessing other aspects of attitude and knowledge of Islamic education. If the educator uses criterion-referenced assessment, I can focus more on mastering each competency that must be achieved, such as memorizing certain verses, understanding Islamic law, or displaying attitudes and behaviors from Islamic teachings. As long as I can meet the criteria set by the educator, I can get a good grade without being compared to my classmates' achievements. This is certainly fairer and more motivating for me to study hard because my grades are purely from my efforts to achieve the expected competencies."* (Class VIII student, 2024)

However, some other learners feel more comfortable with norm-referenced assessment. They consider norm-referenced assessments more realistic and reflect their abilities compared to their classmates. The following quote illustrates this view:

*Norm-referenced assessment makes more sense. Not all learners get the highest score. With norm-referenced assessment, my score can show where I stand compared to my peers. Several aspects of Islamic education are assessed, such as knowledge of Islamic teachings, worship practices, morals, and others. Norm-referenced assessment is more relevant in this context. Norm-referenced assessment means that the scores obtained by students are compared with those obtained by their classmates. This is important because, in Islamic education, many aspects are related to cognitive knowledge practices*

and attitudes that are difficult to assess. For example, in worship practices such as prayer, educators can assess learners based on the quality of their movements, recitation, and solemnity in performing the prayer.

*With norm-referenced assessment, educators can compare each learner's performance with their classmates. Learners with the best prayer quality in their class will get the highest grade, while learners who perform poorly will get lower grades. However, this does not mean learners with low scores do not understand how to worship properly. They just need to keep practicing and improving the quality of their worship. Educators should always be transparent and open in explaining the grading system used and providing constructive feedback to learners. This will help them understand their strengths and weaknesses and be motivated to keep learning and improving. In addition, it is important to remember that assessment is not just about grades but also about character building and noble morals based on Islamic teachings. Educators should set a good example and instill positive values such as honesty, discipline, and respect to learners. Finally, this info should be used by parents in assessing and coaching learners. Cooperation between educators and parents is crucial to create an environment supporting children's overall development."* (Student, 2014).

The principal acknowledged that applying criterion-referenced assessment in Islamic education learning at SMPN 24 Padang still requires greater and continuous efforts. Factors such as educators' understanding, availability of time and resources, and support from the school and education office are still challenges that must be overcome. Nevertheless, the school strives to improve the quality of applying this criterion-referenced assessment because it believes it will positively impact the quality of Islamic education learning at SMPN 24 Padang. This is by the results of the interview with the Principal, namely:

*"The application of criterion-referenced assessment in learning Islamic education in our school positively impacts the overall quality of learning. As one of our Islamic education educators said in criterion-referenced assessment, I can find more clearly where students' weaknesses are in mastering competencies. This helps me to design remedial or enrichment learning that suits their needs. For example, in the assessment of simple essay writing skills, from the criterion-referenced assessment instrument I developed, I can see which learners are still weak in the aspects of content organization, vocabulary use, or grammar. By knowing what competency components need to be improved, I can design an appropriate program for each learner. The application of criterion-referenced assessment can also encourage learners to be more responsible for their learning process. Learners no longer focus on competing with classmates but on efforts to achieve predetermined criteria or standards. This can increase learners' motivation and independence. It must be recognized that applying criterion-referenced assessment in learning Islamic education in our school still requires greater and continuous efforts. Factors such as educators' understanding, availability of time and resources, and support from the school and education office are still challenges that must be overcome. However, we continue to strive to improve the quality of the application of criterion-referenced assessment because we believe that it will positively impact the quality of Islamic education learning in our school."* (Interview with the principal of SMPN 24 Padang, 2024)

These different perceptions indicate that learners have diverse preferences for assessment practices. This can be influenced by learning style, motivation, and learners' understanding of the assessment concept. Learners' perceptions of assessment practices can vary and are influenced by various factors, such as individual characteristics, previous learning experiences, and the learning environment. Therefore, in developing and implementing effective assessment practices, it is important to holistically consider learners' perspectives and needs.

## Discussion

The effectiveness of the assessment training program for Islamic education educators needs to be evaluated to assess its impact on classroom assessment practices. Exploring the potential of digital technologies to support more efficient and accurate implementation of criterion-referenced assessment is also a promising area of research. Cross-cultural studies comparing Islamic education assessment practices in different countries could provide



valuable new insights. Finally, interdisciplinary research involving experts from different disciplines could lead to more holistic and innovative approaches to assessment in Islamic Education learning. By implementing these recommendations, understanding assessment practices in Islamic education learning can be enriched and contribute significantly to improving the quality of Islamic education assessment in the future.

### 1. Efforts to Improve Assessment Quality

Given the importance of assessment in the learning process, improving the quality of assessment carried out by Islamic education educators at SMPN 24 Padang is necessary.

- a. There is a need for intensive training and mentoring for educators on the concept and implementation of criterion-referenced assessment. The school, education office, or competent institutions in educational assessment can carry out this training.
- b. There needs to be an effort to change the mindset or perception of educators about fair and objective assessment. Educators need to understand that criterion-referenced assessment is fairer and more objective because it measures the achievement of learner competencies individually, not by comparing student achievements.
- c. It is necessary to provide adequate time and support for educators in developing criterion-referenced assessment instruments. This can be done by reducing the workload of educators outside of teaching hours so that educators have sufficient time to develop quality assessment instruments.
- d. There is a need for collaboration and sharing of good practices among educators in developing criterion-referenced assessment instruments. Educators can share experiences and strategies in developing assessment instruments that align with curriculum demands.
- e. There needs to be an effort to involve students in the assessment process. Self-assessment and peer assessment can be used as alternatives to increase learners' involvement in the assessment process and encourage them to focus on achieving competencies (Reynolds et al., 2009).

With these efforts, the quality of assessment in Islamic education learning at SMPN 24 Padang can be improved by the demands of the curriculum and the principles of competency-based assessment. This will ultimately contribute to improving the quality of learning and achieving educational goals more optimally. Thus, the quality of assessment in Islamic education learning at SMPN 24 Padang can be improved by the demands of the curriculum and the principles of competency-based assessment. In addition to the efforts previously mentioned, several other steps can be taken to improve the quality of assessment in Islamic education learning at SMPN 24 Padang:

- a. Include a special learning assessment course in the Islamic Education or Tarbiyah study program in higher education. This aims to equip prospective educators with adequate knowledge and skills in conducting assessments, including criterion-referenced assessments.
- b. Holding training and mentoring programs on an ongoing basis for educators already teaching in the field. This program can involve resource persons from academics, practitioners, or related institutions competent in learning assessment.
- c. Provide resources and practical guidance on criterion-referenced assessment that educators can easily access. These resources can be guidebooks, modules, video tutorials, or online platforms that contain examples of criterion-referenced assessment instruments and how to develop them.
- d. Form a community or working group of educators (KKG) to discuss and share good practices in learning assessment. This community can be a place to learn from each other, exchange experiences, and discuss solutions to problems faced in assessment.
- e. Involve the active role of school principals and supervisors in supervising and monitoring the implementation of criterion-referenced assessments in the field. Principals and

supervisors can provide direction, guidance, and feedback to educators in developing and implementing assessments that are by the principles of competency-based assessment.

These efforts are expected to help improve educators' understanding, skills, and commitment to implementing criteria-based assessments optimally. Thus, the quality of assessment in learning Islamic education at SMPN 24 Padang can be improved by the demands of the curriculum and the principles of competency-based assessment.

## 2. The Role of Assessment in Improving the Quality of Islamic Education Learning

In addition to impacting the achievement of learner competencies, the assessment practices applied also influence the overall quality of Islamic education learning. Assessment not only aims to measure learning outcomes but can also be used to improve the learning process (Anjar et al., 2018). This research reveals that applying criterion-referenced assessment in Islamic education learning at SMPN 24 Padang can provide more meaningful feedback for educators and students. By knowing in detail what competencies have and have not been mastered by students, educators can identify students' learning needs and adjust appropriate learning strategies. As expressed by one of the Islamic education educators:

"With criterion-referenced assessment, I can find out in more detail where students' weaknesses are in mastering competencies. This helps me design remedial or enrichment learning that suits their needs, for example, in assessing simple essay writing skills. From the criterion-referenced assessment instrument that I developed, I can see which learners are still weak in content organization, vocabulary use, or grammar. By knowing exactly what components of competence still need to be improved, I can design remedial or enrichment learning programs that suit the needs of each learner. For learners who are still weak in vocabulary use, I can create an enrichment program by providing exercises focusing on vocabulary mastery.

Meanwhile, I can provide an enrichment program with a higher level of difficulty for learners who are already proficient in this aspect. That's why criterion-referenced assessment helps me to improve the quality of learning in the classroom. By knowing the specific needs of each learner, I can guide them to achieve maximum competence" (Islamic religion teacher, Class VIII, 2024).

In addition, the application of criterion-referenced assessment can also encourage learners to be more responsible for their learning process. Learners no longer focus on competing with classmates but on efforts to achieve predetermined criteria or standards. This can increase students' learning motivation and independence in the learning process (Mardapi & Herawan, 2017). This finding is supported by research conducted by Coombs et al. (2020), which states that criterion-referenced assessment can encourage student-centered learning and increase students' involvement in the learning process. Thus, assessment not only serves as a tool to measure learning outcomes but also as a means to improve the overall quality of learning.

However, it must be recognized that applying criterion-referenced assessment in Islamic education learning at SMPN 24 Padang still requires greater and continuous efforts. Factors such as educators' understanding, availability of time and resources, and support from the school and education office are still challenges that must be overcome. With serious efforts from all related parties, it is expected that quality assessment practices can be realized and positively impact the quality of Islamic education learning at SMPN 24 Padang.

The study also explored learners' diverse perceptions of the assessment practices in place. Some learners prefer criterion-referenced assessment because it is considered fairer and gives equal opportunities for each learner to achieve the highest score (Meissel et al. 2017). However, some other learners felt more comfortable with norm-referenced assessment, which they considered more realistic and reflective of their abilities than their classmates (López & Foster, 2021). Another encouraging finding is that applying criterion-referenced assessment in Islamic education learning can provide more meaningful and specific feedback for

educators and learners regarding competencies that have and have not been mastered. This allows educators to design remedial or enrichment learning that is right on target according to the needs of students. Furthermore, criterion-referenced assessment also has the potential to encourage students' independence and higher motivation to learn because they are no longer trapped in unhealthy competition with classmates (Liu & Brantmeier, 2019).

However, efforts to improve the quality of assessment at SMPN 24 Padang still need support from various parties. This research highlights the need for intensive training and mentoring for educators on an ongoing basis, not just once or twice. This training should involve competent resource persons from academics, practitioners, and related institutions in learning assessment. In addition, providing resources and practical guidance on criterion-referenced assessment that educators can easily access is also needed, such as guidebooks, modules, video tutorials, or online platforms that contain examples of instruments and how to develop them. Another important effort is establishing a community or working group of educators (KKG) specifically to discuss and share good practices in learning assessment. This community can be a place to learn from each other, exchange experiences, and discuss solutions to problems in developing and implementing criterion-referenced assessments. With this community, educators are expected to continue to improve their understanding and skills collaboratively. However, these efforts will not run optimally without the involvement and full support of school principals and education offices. School principals and supervisors must play a role in supervising, monitoring, and providing direction, guidance, and feedback to educators in implementing criterion-referenced assessments in the field. Support from the education office is also needed to provide budgets, facilities, and policies that support the implementation of competency-based assessment in schools.

Furthermore, the development and validation of criterion-referenced assessment instruments specific to Islamic education learning must be done by considering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Bogren et al., 2022). Classroom action research involving Islamic education educators can help improve their skills in developing and implementing criterion-referenced assessments. Studies on stakeholders' perceptions, such as parents, school committees, and communities, are also important to gain a broader perspective on Islamic education assessment practices.

## **D. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

### **1. Research Implications**

The results of this study can be the basis for educators in choosing and applying assessment methods that are more in line with the needs of students and the objectives of Islamic education, either through Norm-Referenced Assessment (NRA) or Criterion-Referenced Assessment (CRA). This study can provide insights for policymakers in developing a more relevant evaluation system for Islamic education institutions, including madrasahs and pesantren, so they can adapt to modern challenges.

### **2. Research Contribution**

This study contributes to understanding the evaluation system in Islamic Education learning. The main novelty of this research lies in an in-depth analysis of the implementation of norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments in the context of Islamic education, which has rarely been studied comprehensively. This study explores how these two types of assessments are used to measure students' competence in understanding Islamic teachings and their effectiveness in improving the quality of learning. Unlike previous research that primarily focused on the theoretical aspects of educational assessment systems, this study specifically uncovers real-world practices applied in Islamic schools and the challenges and opportunities in integrating these two assessment methods. Thus, this study enriches the literature on Islamic education assessment by providing new insights into how appropriate

assessment approaches can enhance students' understanding of Islamic values more objectively and fairly while offering recommendations for educators to design more effective and contextual evaluation strategies.

## E. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future researchers are advised to expand the study by comparing Norm-Referenced Assessment (NRA) and Criterion-Referenced Assessment (CRA) with other more innovative assessment methods, such as assessment for learning or performance-based assessment, to provide a more comprehensive picture of assessment in Islamic education. It will also examine the long-term impact of applying NRA and CRA in Islamic education, both on academic achievement and the formation of students' Islamic character, by following their development after graduating from educational institutions.

## F. CONCLUSION

Learning assessment is a crucial element that not only serves to measure students' learning achievements but also significantly influences improving the quality of the learning process itself. This research reveals the ongoing assessment practices at SMPN 24 Padang, especially in Islamic education. Although criterion-referenced assessment has been recommended in the curriculum, the surprising fact was that most Islamic education educators still apply norm-referenced assessment in assessing students' cognitive learning outcomes. Another interesting finding revealed various factors behind this practice, such as deep-rooted habits, educators' perceptions of fairness, and limited understanding and skills in developing criterion-referenced assessment instruments. On the other hand, some educators have implemented criterion-referenced assessments to assess learners' attitudes and skills to the demands of the current curriculum.

This research reveals that the application of Norm-Referenced Assessment (NRA) and Criterion-Referenced Assessment (CRA) in Islamic education is still limited to theory and has not been implemented in depth. Although these two assessment methods have their advantages, such as NRA, which provides an overview of the comparison of student learning outcomes with peer groups, and CRA, which assesses achievement based on predetermined standards, their implementation in the context of Islamic education still faces various challenges, especially related to the adjustment of Islamic values in evaluation. The research also shows that educators in Islamic education tend to rely on more traditional assessment methods and underutilize the potential of these two methods.

The impact of implementing NRA and CRA on student learning outcomes in Islamic education shows that while both can improve academic understanding, there is still a need to integrate these two assessment methods with a more holistic approach, which measures cognitive abilities and develops students' Islamic character. In addition, the study found that the main challenges in implementing NRA and CRA are limited resources, a lack of in-depth understanding of both methods and a lack of support for educators' professional development in using these assessment methods.

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