



The Use of Authentic Assessment in the Evaluation of Christian Religious Education Learning at SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of authentic assessment in Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U, Indonesia, in response to the paradigm shift in modern education from traditional testing toward holistic evaluation of students' knowledge, skills, and character. Authentic assessment, which emphasizes meaningful tasks reflecting real-life contexts, aligns closely with the mission of CRE to cultivate students who are not only knowledgeable but also faithful, moral, and responsible. Unlike conventional evaluations that focus primarily on rote memorization, authentic assessment engages learners in projects, reflective journals, portfolios, and service-oriented tasks that foster deeper understanding, critical thinking, collaboration, and the embodiment of Christian values. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research involved one CRE teacher and twenty eighth-grade students as primary participants. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of instructional documents, including lesson plans, project sheets, rubrics, and student work. Thematic analysis revealed that authentic assessment enhanced student engagement, creativity, responsibility, and reflective capacity. Students expressed greater enthusiasm for learning when tasks connected classroom lessons with their daily lives and spiritual practices. Furthermore, authentic assessment provided opportunities for teachers to capture students' affective and spiritual growth alongside academic performance. Nevertheless, challenges emerged, including limited time, difficulties in rubric design, and uneven student readiness. These findings underscore the need for professional development, institutional support, and systematic assessment guidelines. Overall, the study concludes that authentic assessment holds significant potential for transforming CRE into a more contextual, inspirational, and character-forming learning experience.

Keywords: *Authentic Assessment, Evaluation, Christian Religious Education*

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamics of modern education, the paradigm of evaluation has undergone a significant shift from merely measuring learning outcomes to a more comprehensive

assessment of students' processes and overall development. This transformation reflects the competency-based education model, which requires students not only to acquire knowledge but also to apply it meaningfully in real-life contexts. Within this framework, Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a pivotal role in shaping holistic individuals who are faithful, moral, and responsible as part of Indonesia's national education goals. Thus, evaluation in CRE must reflect the values being taught, not only focusing on rote memorization or cognitive mastery but also addressing character formation and the integration of faith into daily life (Lickona, 2019). Authentic assessment emerges as a strategic evaluation approach aligned with the mission of CRE. Unlike traditional assessments that rely heavily on multiple-choice tests or written essays, authentic assessment encourages students to engage in meaningful tasks that mirror real-life situations. In the context of CRE, such tasks may include designing a social service project, writing spiritual reflections, compiling portfolios that document Christian values in daily practices, or presenting about biblical figures and applying their teachings to the local cultural setting. These forms of assessment do not simply measure students' knowledge; rather, they evaluate deeper understanding, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and personal integrity (Wiggins, 1998). By engaging in these tasks, students are invited to integrate biblical principles into practical experiences, fostering character development alongside academic achievement. Despite its potential, the implementation of authentic assessment in schools continues to face considerable challenges. Many teachers still lack a comprehensive understanding of authentic assessment principles and remain more comfortable with traditional evaluation methods due to their practicality and ease of grading. Moreover, there is a shortage of structured training that equips teachers with the skills to innovate in assessment design. Time constraints and the absence of standardized yet contextually relevant assessment instruments further complicate the application of authentic assessment in classrooms (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2014). Consequently, assessments often fail to capture the full range of student development, particularly in moral and character formation. In CRE specifically, this limitation risks reducing the richness of Christian education into mere cognitive exercises rather than transformative learning experiences.

These issues provide the rationale for conducting research on authentic assessment at SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U. This school has demonstrated a strong commitment to character education through CRE classes, yet little is known about how authentic assessment is implemented within this context. Investigating this case offers valuable insights into both the practices and challenges of integrating authentic assessment in middle school CRE. The study aims not only to describe current practices but also to evaluate their impact on improving the quality of CRE learning. Specifically, it seeks to examine how authentic assessment influences student engagement, fosters reflection, and enhances their understanding of Christian values as the core of the curriculum. The research is expected to contribute significantly to the academic discourse on authentic assessment, particularly within the field of CRE in Indonesian secondary schools. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of aligning assessment with real-world applications and character formation (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010), but there remains a scarcity of empirical research exploring its practical implementation in religious education. Thus, this study addresses a critical gap by situating authentic assessment within a faith-based

educational context. Furthermore, its findings may provide practical recommendations for CRE teachers seeking to design more relevant, inspirational, and transformative assessment strategies. The integration of authentic assessment into CRE holds the promise of transforming evaluation into more than a measurement tool. It becomes an integral component of the educational journey, guiding students to embody Christian faith, engage critically with their surroundings, and take responsibility for their actions. When assessment reflects real-life applications, it reinforces the idea that education is not an isolated process confined to classrooms but a preparation for life itself. For CRE, this means cultivating students who not only understand biblical teachings but also practice them in their daily lives, becoming witnesses of integrity, compassion, and responsibility in society. In this way, authentic assessment contributes to the broader goal of Indonesian education: nurturing generations of students who are academically capable, spiritually resilient, and morally grounded (Groome, 2011).

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the context and actual practices of authentic assessment in Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U. The case study design was particularly suitable for exploring the dynamics of classroom assessment, as it focuses on the lived experiences of both teachers and students in their natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research focused on understanding the process of implementing authentic assessment by the CRE teacher and examining its impact on student engagement and learning outcomes. The participants in this study consisted of one CRE teacher and twenty eighth-grade students, who served as the primary informants. Data collection was carried out using three main techniques: classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted across three CRE sessions to directly observe the implementation of authentic assessment, with particular attention to teacher–student interactions and students' responses to the authentic tasks assigned. These observations provided insights into the practical aspects of teaching and the ways in which students engaged with real-life learning activities. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to capture participants' perspectives. The interview with the teacher focused on the objectives, strategies, and challenges of applying authentic assessment, while interviews with students explored their perceptions of the values and learning outcomes derived from their participation in authentic tasks. Document analysis was also conducted to examine instructional materials such as lesson plans (RPP), project task sheets, assessment rubrics, and students' completed work. These documents provided additional evidence on the structure and evaluation of authentic assessment practices, as well as the extent to which Christian values were embedded within the tasks. Data collected from these multiple sources were analyzed using thematic analysis. Through this process, the researcher identified and categorized recurring themes, such as the types of authentic assessment used, the level of student participation, and students' reflections on the values they internalized during the learning process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Member checking was also conducted by presenting preliminary findings to both the teacher and student participants, allowing them to confirm or clarify the researcher's interpretations.

These strategies ensured that the results were credible and accurately represented the participants' experiences. The findings are expected to offer practical recommendations for enhancing the quality of evaluation practices in schools, positioning assessment not merely as a measurement tool but as an integral component of character and faith formation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In contemporary education, evaluation has evolved from being a mere measurement of student achievement to becoming a holistic process that reflects the complexity of learning and human development. This shift is in line with competency-based education models, which emphasize not only the acquisition of factual knowledge but also the application of that knowledge in meaningful, real-life contexts. Within the Indonesian educational system, Christian Religious Education (CRE) occupies a strategic position in shaping students' moral, spiritual, and social character. It aims to nurture learners into holistic individuals who are faithful, responsible, and capable of living out Christian values in daily life. Consequently, assessment within CRE must transcend traditional testing models and embrace methods that are capable of evaluating spiritual, ethical, and affective growth alongside academic achievement (Lickona, 2019). Authentic assessment has emerged as a relevant and effective approach to meeting these expectations. Unlike conventional forms of evaluation that prioritize standardized tests and cognitive recall, authentic assessment emphasizes the performance of tasks that mirror real-life challenges. Students are engaged in projects, reflective writing, portfolios, group discussions, and community-based activities that encourage them to connect classroom learning with everyday life (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Within the context of CRE, such tasks may include journaling personal acts of kindness, conducting service projects, or presenting biblical role models and their contemporary relevance. These forms of assessment provide opportunities not only to measure students' comprehension of theological concepts but also to gauge their ability to embody Christian values in practice. At SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U, a state junior high school situated in a culturally diverse area, authentic assessment has been intentionally integrated into the teaching of CRE. Based on classroom observations and interviews, the teacher consistently sought to design learning experiences that connected students' faith with their lived realities. This approach was not merely about assessing knowledge retention but rather about facilitating spiritual formation, moral reflection, and behavioral transformation. By incorporating journals, projects, portfolios, reflective discussions, and demonstrations, the teacher attempted to move beyond surface-level assessment toward deeper engagement with faith-based learning. Students were thus encouraged to express their faith through creative and practical means, bridging the gap between classroom knowledge and personal life experience (Groome, 2011). One example illustrates this practice effectively. When exploring the Christian theme of love, the teacher avoided limiting evaluation to multiple-choice or short-answer tests. Instead, students were instructed to keep a spiritual journal in which they recorded concrete acts of love they had demonstrated throughout the week, whether at home, at school, or in their community (Ariawan, 2021). These journals included not only a description of their actions but also a reflective commentary on how the experiences related to biblical teachings. Through this exercise, assessment extended beyond intellectual recognition of

the principle of love into the affective and behavioral domains. The teacher was able to discern how deeply students internalized the value, while students themselves had an opportunity to reflect on their faith journey and personal growth. This aligns with Palmer's (2007) concept of teachers as "living curricula," where authentic teaching and evaluation are not confined to abstract content but embodied in life practices.

Another significant form of authentic assessment implemented at SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U involved group projects focused on biblical figures such as Joseph, Ruth, or Paul. These projects required students not only to narrate the biblical story but also to contextualize its moral and spiritual lessons for present-day challenges. In completing these assignments, students demonstrated critical thinking by identifying connections between scripture and current social realities, collaborative skills by working as a team, and communication skills through presentations. Some groups presented their projects using multimedia slides, short videos, or dramatizations, which reflected creativity and engagement. Such activities echoed Eisner's (2013) argument that assessment in the humanities should not be limited to quantifiable outcomes but should also capture expressive and interpretive dimensions of learning. Interviews with the teacher revealed that the intention behind adopting authentic assessment was to nurture deeper meaning-making and holistic growth among students. Rather than treating CRE as an abstract subject, the teacher emphasized its relevance to everyday ethical decisions, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual practices. By encouraging students to reflect, act, and collaborate, authentic assessment created conditions where learners were not only evaluated for what they knew but also for who they were becoming as Christian individuals. This resonates with Groome's (2011) shared praxis approach, which highlights the integration of faith and lived experience as central to Christian education. The implementation was not without challenges. The teacher acknowledged that not all students were equally prepared for reflective writing or group collaboration. Some struggled with articulating personal experiences in their journals, while others found it difficult to work harmoniously in teams. Moreover, time constraints within the school schedule posed limitations, as authentic assessment tasks often required more time for planning, execution, and evaluation compared to traditional tests. Despite these difficulties, the teacher insisted that the benefits outweighed the obstacles, since authentic assessment fostered meaningful learning and contributed directly to character formation. These initial findings at SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U highlight the transformative potential of authentic assessment in CRE. By grounding evaluation in real-life tasks that engage cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, teachers can cultivate learning experiences that prepare students not only for academic success but also for faithful Christian living. This case underscores the broader educational principle that assessment should be an integral part of learning, shaping not just knowledge acquisition but also personal and spiritual identity (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2014).

Student Engagement and Character Formation

One of the most notable outcomes of authentic assessment in Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U was the significant increase in student engagement. Unlike traditional forms of testing that often confine students to passive

recall of biblical facts, authentic assessment invited learners to take ownership of their learning through active participation, collaboration, and reflection. This shift from passive reception to active involvement proved transformative, not only for academic purposes but also for the development of character and spiritual maturity. Observations of classroom practice revealed that students displayed heightened enthusiasm when engaged in authentic assessment tasks. During group projects, for instance, learners eagerly divided roles among themselves, with some responsible for research, others for creating visual aids, and still others for delivering oral presentations. Rather than perceiving assignments as mere obligations, students demonstrated creativity in presenting biblical themes through multimedia slides, short videos, or dramatizations. This creative energy reflected a sense of personal investment in the learning process, a feature that is often absent in traditional paper-and-pencil examinations (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2014). Interviews with students confirmed this finding. Many reported that they felt more motivated to complete assignments that allowed them to connect learning with their personal lives and interests. A recurring sentiment among students was that authentic assessment felt “more real” than conventional tests, since the tasks mirrored situations they encountered in their families, communities, and spiritual lives. For example, journaling acts of kindness encouraged students to become more mindful of their daily behavior and to seek opportunities to embody Christian values. In this sense, the act of assessment became intertwined with the process of moral formation, as students were encouraged not only to recall biblical knowledge but also to enact it in practice. This aligns with Lickona’s (2019) framework of character education, which argues that moral growth requires opportunities for action and reflection, not merely instruction. The reflective journals produced by students further demonstrated the effectiveness of authentic assessment in shaping their spiritual and social attitudes. Several journals contained candid admissions about personal struggles, such as difficulty in forgiving classmates or in maintaining daily prayer habits. Yet these same entries also revealed progress, with students noting improvements in patience, honesty, and empathy over time. Such reflections indicated that authentic assessment created a safe space for self-examination, where students could confront their shortcomings and celebrate their growth. From the perspective of the teacher, these journals provided valuable insights into students’ inner lives, allowing for more personalized guidance and support. The process also resonates with Groome’s (2011) vision of Christian education as shared praxis, where faith and life are brought into dialogue through reflective engagement.

Student engagement was also evident in the collaborative aspects of authentic assessment. Working on group projects, students learned not only biblical content but also practical skills such as communication, conflict resolution, and teamwork. At times, disagreements arose within groups regarding how to present their material or divide responsibilities. Instead of avoiding these conflicts, the teacher guided students to resolve their differences by applying Christian principles of respect, patience, and forgiveness. This provided opportunities for experiential learning, where students were challenged to embody the very values being studied. In this regard, authentic assessment facilitated not only cognitive and affective growth but also social development, equipping learners with skills that extended beyond the classroom (Noddings, 2013). Authentic assessment encouraged students to connect classroom learning with their families and communities.

Several assignments, such as reflective journals or community service projects, required learners to interact with parents, siblings, or neighbors as part of their tasks. For example, one assignment invited students to document moments when they practiced forgiveness in their homes. This not only reinforced Christian values within the classroom but also extended their impact into the domestic sphere, strengthening the relationship between school and family. Such practices echoed Epstein's (2001) model of school–family partnerships, which highlights the importance of collaboration between educators and parents in supporting student development. An important dimension of engagement observed in this study was students' increasing ability to internalize Christian values and translate them into behavior. Interviews with students suggested that authentic assessment encouraged them to view CRE as relevant to their daily lives rather than as an abstract subject. Several students admitted that they began to pray more regularly, became more willing to help classmates, or made deliberate efforts to apologize when they made mistakes. These behavioral changes, though small, were tangible indicators of character formation nurtured through experiential learning. In other words, authentic assessment acted as a bridge between biblical principles and lived behavior, facilitating the integration of faith into life practice. Teachers also noticed positive changes in classroom dynamics. According to the CRE teacher, disruptions decreased as students became more engaged in meaningful tasks. Instead of being preoccupied with misbehavior, learners were more focused on completing their projects, journaling their experiences, or preparing their group presentations. The sense of responsibility generated by authentic assessment helped cultivate an environment where students held themselves accountable for both academic and moral growth. This finding aligns with Hattie and Timperley's (2007) emphasis on constructive feedback and meaningful tasks as catalysts for student motivation and achievement. It is also important to highlight that authentic assessment did not only benefit high-achieving students. Observations showed that even those who traditionally struggled with academic performance found opportunities to excel in tasks that required creativity, collaboration, or practical demonstration. For instance, students who found written tests difficult often thrived in dramatizations or oral presentations. This inclusivity reinforced the principle that education must respect multiple intelligences and learning styles, thereby promoting equity in the classroom. By valuing diverse forms of expression, authentic assessment provided opportunities for all students to contribute meaningfully, enhancing their sense of belonging and self-worth (Eisner, 2013). The implementation of authentic assessment at SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U clearly enhanced student engagement and character formation. By making learning more relevant, participatory, and reflective, authentic assessment transformed CRE from a subject centered on rote memorization into a living process of faith formation. Students were not only evaluated for what they knew but also for who they were becoming. The outcomes observed in this case suggest that when assessment is aligned with the holistic goals of Christian education, it can serve as a powerful instrument for both academic success and spiritual growth.

Challenges and Solutions in Implementing Authentic Assessment

While the benefits of authentic assessment in Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U were evident, its implementation was not without significant challenges.

The teacher's commitment to integrating meaningful and experiential forms of evaluation was often constrained by structural, pedagogical, and contextual barriers. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring that authentic assessment can be sustained and scaled up within the broader educational framework. One of the most pressing obstacles identified was the issue of time management. Authentic assessments, by their very nature, demand a considerable investment of time, both during class and in the teacher's workload outside the classroom. For example, projects and reflective journals required extended preparation, execution, and evaluation compared to traditional multiple-choice tests. The teacher reported difficulties in balancing the demands of curriculum coverage with the depth required for authentic learning tasks. This tension between breadth and depth is not unique to this context but has been widely documented in educational literature (Tilaar, 2004). Without sufficient time, there is a risk that authentic assessment may be rushed, reducing its potential impact on student learning and character formation. Another challenge lay in the difficulty of developing reliable and objective evaluation tools. Unlike standardized tests that provide clear-cut right or wrong answers, authentic assessments often involve subjective elements such as personal reflection, attitudes, and values. For example, assessing a student's journal on acts of kindness or their collaborative skills in group projects cannot be reduced to numerical scores alone. The teacher acknowledged the difficulty of designing rubrics that were both comprehensive and fair, ensuring that every student was evaluated consistently. This challenge reflects a broader issue in education, where subjective dimensions of learning—especially moral and spiritual development—are inherently more complex to measure (Eisner, 2013). The diverse abilities and backgrounds of students also posed difficulties in implementation. Not all learners were equally prepared to engage with reflective writing or group collaboration. Some students struggled to articulate personal experiences in their journals, while others found it difficult to work harmoniously with peers during projects. Socio-economic challenges further complicated the situation, as certain students lacked access to resources—such as internet connectivity or parental support—that could enhance the quality of their assignments. These disparities highlight the influence of broader social contexts on student performance, echoing Vygotsky's (1978) assertion that learning is deeply shaped by the learner's environment. Teacher preparation emerged as another critical barrier. The CRE teacher admitted to relying heavily on personal intuition and spiritual conviction rather than formal training in authentic assessment. While this approach often produced meaningful outcomes, it also limited the teacher's ability to systematically apply authentic assessment across different learning contexts. The lack of structured professional development in this area is a systemic problem, as few training programs explicitly equip educators with the knowledge and tools required to integrate authentic assessment into religious education. As Sihombing (2020) has noted, the absence of formal preparation leaves teachers vulnerable to inconsistencies and limits the scalability of effective practices. Despite these challenges, the study also revealed several strategies and solutions that can enhance the successful implementation of authentic assessment. First, time constraints can be mitigated through careful planning and integration of assessment with instruction. Instead of treating assessment as a separate activity, the CRE teacher can embed reflective practices and project-based learning directly into lesson delivery. This approach reduces redundancy and ensures that evaluation is naturally aligned with the learning process. Furthermore, schools can

provide institutional support by adjusting schedules or allotting dedicated periods for project work, thereby giving teachers the flexibility to implement authentic tasks more effectively. In terms of developing objective evaluation tools, the use of well-designed rubrics offers a practical solution. By outlining clear criteria for performance—such as clarity of reflection, demonstration of biblical understanding, creativity, and collaboration—teachers can minimize subjectivity and ensure fairness. Training sessions focused on rubric design and qualitative assessment techniques would be invaluable for building teacher confidence in this area. Collaborative efforts among teachers, where rubrics are co-developed and tested, can also enhance reliability and consistency across classrooms (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). To address disparities among students, differentiated instruction and scaffolding are essential. Teachers can provide multiple options for demonstrating learning, allowing students to choose between written reflections, oral presentations, or creative projects such as videos or artwork. This flexibility acknowledges diverse talents and reduces barriers for students with limited resources. Additionally, fostering peer mentoring within group projects can help students support one another, building a sense of community while ensuring that weaker students are not left behind. These practices align with the principles of inclusive education, which seek to accommodate diverse learners while maintaining equity (Noddings, 2013). Teacher training is perhaps the most crucial area for long-term improvement. Schools and educational authorities should prioritize professional development programs that specifically focus on authentic assessment in religious education. Workshops, mentoring programs, and communities of practice can provide teachers with both theoretical grounding and practical strategies. This investment in teacher capacity not only benefits classroom practice but also contributes to the institutionalization of authentic assessment as a sustainable approach to evaluation. Parental involvement was identified as an effective support mechanism in overcoming challenges. Encouraging parents to engage with their children's reflective assignments, such as journals or service projects, helps reinforce values beyond the classroom and ensures continuity between school and home. Strengthening school–family partnerships also provides a safety net for students facing socio-economic challenges, as parents become more actively involved in the moral and spiritual development of their children (Epstein, 2001). While the implementation of authentic assessment at SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U encountered substantial challenges—including time constraints, evaluation difficulties, diverse student readiness, and limited teacher preparation—the study highlights feasible solutions that can enhance effectiveness. With institutional support, professional development, differentiated strategies, and parental involvement, authentic assessment has the potential to flourish as a transformative tool in Christian Religious Education. Far from being an insurmountable challenge, these obstacles provide opportunities to refine and strengthen practices that ultimately align assessment with the holistic mission of education: nurturing students' knowledge, character, and faith in an integrated manner.

Conclusion

The findings of this study affirm that authentic assessment plays a pivotal role in enhancing the effectiveness of evaluation in Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SMP Negeri 2 O'O'U. Its implementation within the learning process functions not only as a tool to measure students' academic achievements but also as an effective means to assess affective, spiritual, and social dimensions, which constitute the core objectives of CRE. The various forms of authentic assessment applied by the teacher - such as individual and group projects, reflective portfolios, spiritual journals, and other context-based assignments - enabled students to connect classroom learning with real-life experiences while fostering the embodiment of Christian values in their daily practices. The integration of authentic assessment also proved successful in increasing students' active participation, stimulating creativity, and cultivating a strong sense of responsibility and self-reflection. Students displayed greater enthusiasm toward learning, felt personally valued, and were able to articulate their understanding through diverse forms of expression. This process encouraged deeper emotional and spiritual engagement, thereby strengthening the transformative impact of CRE on students' character development. The study also identified several challenges in the implementation of authentic assessment, including time limitations, difficulties in designing comprehensive assessment rubrics, and varying levels of student readiness. These challenges highlight the need for greater attention from educational stakeholders, particularly in strengthening teacher professional development, providing sufficient institutional support and time allocation, as well as designing systematic and contextually relevant assessment guidelines. This research contributes significantly to advancing a more meaningful and transformative evaluation framework in CRE. Authentic assessment has the capacity to create a more humanistic and relevant learning environment, where students are assessed not only on what they know but also on how they live out those values in practice. It is therefore recommended that authentic assessment be continuously developed and systematically integrated into the CRE curriculum, supported by institutional policies and sustained teacher training. In doing so, CRE can become more contextual, resonate with students' real-life experiences, and effectively shape individuals who are faithful, wise, and responsible members of society.

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