



Transforming Non-Formal Education: Pedagogical Innovations and Character Development in Assessment

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ABSTRACT

In the context of 21st-century education, non-formal education is vital for addressing diverse learning needs and preparing students for global challenges. This study examines innovative assessment practices at Hayat School, focusing on their alignment with national standards and impact on student development. The study aims to explore how holistic assessment can enhance learning by incorporating cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual growth. Using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and document analysis, the study gathers comprehensive insights. Results show that Hayat School's assessment strategies significantly enhance student engagement and learning by fostering resilience and emotional intelligence. These practices support academic achievement and equip students with competencies needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world. However, challenges remain in standardizing non-academic assessments and effectively communicating progress to parents and stakeholders. The study concludes that while the holistic approach has substantial potential for long-term benefits, ongoing efforts are needed to refine assessment methods and improve communication. Future research should focus on developing standardized tools for evaluating non-academic growth and exploring the adaptability of these practices in other educational contexts. This research contributes to understanding how non-formal education can drive innovation and meet contemporary learning demands.

Keywords: *assessment standards, non-formal education, Hayat school.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving landscape of education, non-formal education is increasingly recognized for its role in providing flexible and accessible learning opportunities. These settings are vital, particularly in regions where formal education systems may not fully meet the diverse needs of all learners. As educational paradigms shift towards more inclusive and adaptable learning environments, the assessment standards within non-formal contexts become crucial. This study focuses on the innovative approaches to educational assessment at Hayat School, exploring how these practices align with and diverge from national assessment standards.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the dynamics of educational assessment in non-formal settings, with a particular focus on the innovative practices implemented by Hayat School. By examining these practices, we aim to contribute to the broader discourse on educational assessment and its adaptation to diverse learning environments. This study seeks to bridge the gap between traditional assessment methods and the unique needs of non-formal education, offering insights into how these approaches can enhance educational outcomes.

Current research in educational assessment predominantly emphasizes standardized testing and formal metrics, which may not fully capture the learning experiences in non-formal settings. Key publications have begun to address this gap, suggesting alternative assessment methods that prioritize learner engagement, practical skills, and contextual relevance (Jannah & Widyanti, 2024). However, there remains a lack of consensus on how best to implement these methods within non-formal education frameworks, leading to ongoing debates and diverse hypotheses regarding their efficacy and applicability (Christidou et al., 2022).

The main aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the assessment practices at Hayat School, identifying innovative strategies that align with or challenge existing national standards. Through in-depth interviews with the school's head, this research will uncover the underlying principles guiding these practices and their impact on learners. The principal conclusions of this study will offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers interested in enhancing the quality and relevance of assessments in non-formal education settings. By contributing to the understanding of how innovative assessment practices can be integrated



into national standards, this research aims to support the development of more inclusive and effective educational systems.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore innovations in educational assessment at Hayat School and their alignment with national assessment standards. The primary subjects of this research are the school principal and other relevant stakeholders who have direct knowledge and experience regarding assessment management within the institution. This focus allows for a comprehensive understanding of the practices and challenges associated with educational assessment in a non-formal setting.

Data collection is conducted through two main techniques: in-depth interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews with the principal and stakeholders facilitate an exploration of various topics, including the implementation of assessment innovations, the challenges faced in their application, and the alignment of these practices with national standards. This method allows participants the flexibility to share their insights and experiences while ensuring that key topics are addressed (Swietlik et al., 2024). Additionally, a review of relevant literature and documents, such as educational policies, assessment frameworks, and annual reports, provides broader context and supports the findings from the interviews.

The data obtained from the interviews are analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves several steps. First, the interviews are transcribed to create a text that can be systematically analyzed. Key themes are then identified from the data, which are compared with information from the documents to enhance understanding and provide a comprehensive view of the assessment practices at Hayat School.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the study employs triangulation by comparing interview results with document findings. Additionally, member checking is conducted to confirm initial interpretations with the informant, ensuring that the analysis accurately reflects their perspectives (Zairul, 2021). Through this rigorous methodology, the research aims to provide comprehensive insights into the innovative assessment practices at Hayat School and their contributions to meeting national educational standards.

3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The results and discussion section of this study delves into the comparative analysis between the innovative assessment standards implemented at Hayat School and the more traditional National Assessment Standards in Indonesia. This examination is crucial as it highlights the adaptability and effectiveness of non-formal educational assessment methods in fostering holistic development and meeting the unique needs of students outside the conventional education system.

This section presents the findings from the qualitative research conducted at Hayat School, focusing on the innovations in educational assessment and their alignment with national assessment standards. The study aimed to explore how these innovations are implemented, the challenges faced during their application, and the impact they have on student learning and engagement. Through in-depth interviews with the school principal and a thorough review of relevant documents, several key themes emerged that highlight the unique practices at Hayat School.

The first theme discusses the specific innovative assessment practices adopted by the school, showcasing how these methods differ from traditional approaches. The second theme addresses the challenges encountered in implementing these innovations, providing insights into the complexities of educational reform within a non-formal context. The third theme examines the alignment of these practices with national assessment standards, emphasizing the importance of compliance in enhancing educational quality. Finally, the fourth theme explores the perceived impact of these innovations on student learning outcomes and engagement, drawing connections to existing literature on effective assessment practices. By analyzing these themes, this section aims to provide a



comprehensive understanding of the innovative assessment landscape at Hayat School, offering valuable insights into the broader implications for educational assessment in non-formal education settings.

3.1 Innovations in Assessment Practices

Hayat School, located at Bandung, operates as a non-formal education institution under the Indonesian Creativity Council Foundation, which was established in 2015. The school's guiding philosophy, encapsulated in its slogan "Learning to Live Well" emphasizes the importance of creating a positive school environment, effective governance, and strong relationships with parents and stakeholders. According to the interview with the principal, Hayat School has a vision.

"To be recognized as an institution that nurtures creativity based on innate potential, centered on the teachings of the Al-Qur'an. This vision not only informs the school's commitment to academic excellence but also emphasizes the cultivation of future leaders who are equipped to make meaningful contributions to Indonesian society."

By fostering an environment that prioritizes creativity and personal growth, Hayat School aims to support each student in realizing their unique potential and preparing them for a successful future.

A distinctive feature of Hayat School is its understanding that every child possesses unique innate potential. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, the school emphasizes personalized education that aligns with each child's individual needs and abilities. This philosophy is operationalized through a project-based learning framework tailored to five educational levels:

- Niti Harti (Early Childhood Education, ages 5-7)
- Niti Surti (Elementary School grades 1-4, ages 7-10)
- Niti Bukti (Elementary School grades 5 to Junior High School grade 9, ages 10-15)
- Niti Bakti (Senior High School, ages 15-17)

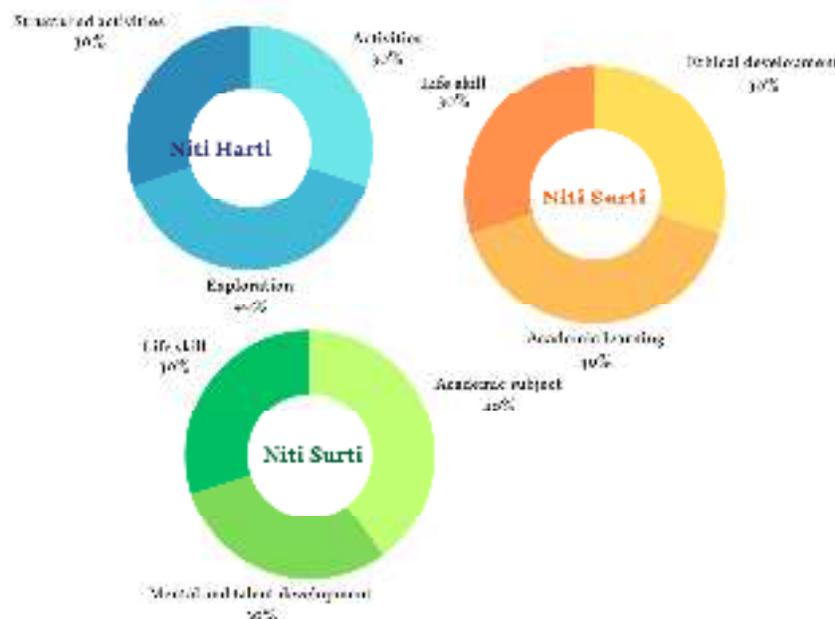


Figure 1. Learning Compositions for Assessment Practices

At each educational level, Hayat School implements specific learning compositions that reflect its innovative assessment practices as seen in Figure 1. For instance, at the Niti Harti level, the curriculum consists of 30% play activities, 40% exploration, and 30% structured activities, allowing young learners to engage in experiential learning while developing foundational skills. At the Niti Surti level, the focus shifts to fostering an



ethical mindset, with 30% of the curriculum dedicated to ethical development, 40% to academic learning, and 30% to life skills. The Niti Bukti level further emphasizes academic rigor, allocating 40% to academic subjects, 30% to mental and talent development, and 30% to life skills.

3.2 Program Design and Assessment in Non-Formal Education

The program at Hayat School is part of a Personalized Curriculum process, allowing activities to be observed individually by educators and parents. This personalized observation enables the development of tailored approaches for each student's age level, fostering a process of Creativity Exploration. The active learning approach is grounded in five fundamental potentials: Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, Social, and Cognitive. These potentials guide the development of learning activities, such as building faith dialogues to instill spiritual awareness and engaging in sensory motor activities for physical development. Emotional growth is encouraged through the expression of feelings, while social skills are enhanced by practicing communication and appreciating ownership. Cognitive potential is nurtured by helping students realize their worth and capabilities.

To support students with learning difficulties, the school conducts special observations to identify and address hindrances in the learning process. This approach is based on the philosophy that no student is inherently slow to learn; rather, there are obstacles that need to be overcome. Assessments at Hayat School begin with an initial evaluation to understand each student's strengths, weaknesses, and special needs, establishing a starting point for their learning journey. Routine assessments follow, monitoring progress and adjusting teaching methods as necessary. These assessments include not only written tests but also observations of daily activities and social interactions. Parental involvement is recognized as crucial to student success, and Hayat School actively engages parents in the assessment process. This involvement focuses on both academic progress and personal and social development. Regular meetings and open communication between teachers and parents facilitate discussions about students' progress and challenges, ensuring a collaborative approach to education.

Promotion to the next grade at Hayat School is not solely based on academic grades but also considers other aspects such as emotional maturity, readiness to face challenges at the next level, and progress in personal and social development. Decisions regarding grade promotion are made with input from teachers, parents, and sometimes the students themselves, ensuring that every decision is made with the best interests of the students in mind. Graduation from Hayat School represents the culmination of a comprehensive learning process. Like grade promotion, graduation is also viewed as a joint decision between the school and parents. This includes a thorough evaluation of students' progress during their time at the school, in both academic and non-academic aspects. Graduation is not only seen as an academic achievement but also as preparation for students to enter the next stage of their lives, whether that be further education or the workforce.

3.3 Alignment with National Assessment Standard

As a non-formal educational institution, Hayat School actively participates in the National Assessment conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. This participation is part of the government's efforts to ensure that national education standards are met across all types of educational institutions, including those like Hayat School. By engaging in this assessment, Hayat School demonstrates its commitment to providing high-quality education and achieving educational equity with formal schools. This process is vital as it confirms that students at Hayat School are afforded a quality education that is on par with their peers in more traditional settings. Moreover, it enables the school to continually refine and adapt its teaching methodologies to more effectively meet the diverse needs of its students.

The innovative assessment practices at Hayat School are designed to go beyond measuring academic achievement. They aim to support holistic development by encouraging students to discover their strengths and interests. By fostering a learning environment that prioritizes creativity and personal growth, Hayat School prepares students to thrive both academically and socially. This aligns with the school's mission to nurture well-rounded individuals who can make meaningful contributions to society. Furthermore, these practices enhance student engagement and ensure alignment with national assessment standards, underscoring the school's dedication to educational quality and innovation.



Furthermore, these innovative practices play a critical role in enhancing student engagement, thereby ensuring that the school's assessments align with national standards. This alignment is crucial for integrating non-formal education frameworks into the broader educational landscape, promoting a more inclusive and adaptable educational system. By implementing such practices, Hayat School underscores its dedication to educational quality and innovation, setting a benchmark for non-formal education institutions nationwide. This proactive approach not only benefits the students at Hayat School but also contributes to the ongoing dialogue about educational best practices and the future of learning in Indonesia.

3.4 Challenges in Implementing Innovations

Implementing innovative assessment standards at Hayat School presents considerable challenges, particularly in aligning these standards with the diverse needs and developmental potentials of its students. One of the primary obstacles, as highlighted by the school principal, is the difficulty in quantitatively measuring key aspects of student development, such as emotional, social, and spiritual growth. The principal stated,

"These areas are inherently complex and involve long-term processes that do not lend themselves easily to traditional assessment metrics."

This complexity necessitates the development of nuanced and flexible evaluation methods that can accurately reflect the holistic growth of students, a task that proves challenging to standardize and effectively communicate to all stakeholders involved.

Moreover, the school encounters challenges related to parental expectations and understanding. The principal noted,

"Not everyone especially can be patient in waiting for students' progress. At Hayat School, we do not focus on the final exam scores to compare students with each other; instead, we look at how much progress has been made compared to the student's initial condition."

This philosophy underscores a commitment to gradual, long-term development over immediate academic results. However, this approach can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or dissatisfaction among parents who may expect quicker, more tangible outcomes in terms of academic performance.

These challenges highlight the need for continuous dialogue and education among parents and other stakeholders about the value and effectiveness of holistic education strategies. By fostering a broader understanding and acceptance of these innovative practices, Hayat School aims to bridge the gap between traditional expectations and the progressive educational experiences it offers, ensuring a supportive environment for all students to thrive.

3.5 Impact on Student Learning and Engagement

The innovative educational approach implemented by Hayat School has significantly enhanced student learning and engagement, as emphasized by the principal during interviews. The principal noted that students have demonstrated remarkable improvements in their ability to express emotions and communicate effectively. This progress is largely attributed to the school's emphasis on holistic development, which has bolstered student confidence and provided a nurturing environment for exploring individual strengths and interests.

Observations by the principal also indicate that students are considerably more engaged in classroom activities, showing heightened levels of participation and enthusiasm. The school's adoption of a personalized curriculum and active learning strategies has been crucial in fostering critical thinking skills and a deep-seated passion for learning. This heightened engagement is apparent in students' readiness to take initiative in their projects and their willingness to collaborate with peers. Additionally, the principal highlighted that students have shown increased emotional maturity and social awareness. The integration of spiritual and ethical discussions within the curriculum has deepened students' understanding of personal values and community responsibilities. This comprehensive approach not only boosts academic performance but also equips students to effectively navigate complex social environments.



Overall, the insights provided by the principal suggest that Hayat School's innovative practices successfully support both academic and personal growth. This creates a dynamic and engaging learning experience that benefits students across multiple dimensions, aligning perfectly with the school's mission to nurture well-rounded individuals. These outcomes underscore the effectiveness of Hayat School's educational strategies in enhancing student development and engagement.

The results of this study demonstrate the positive impact of Hayat School's innovative educational approach on student learning and engagement. These findings align with the original objectives outlined in the introduction, which aimed to explore how personalized and holistic education strategies could enhance student development across multiple dimensions, including emotional, social, and cognitive growth. The adoption of a holistic and inclusive assessment approach at Hayat School has shown significant positive impacts on student learning and engagement. This approach prioritizes individual learning processes, emphasizing perseverance and a love of learning over mere academic outcomes. This aligns with (Kanwar, 2012) that resilience and the willingness to learn continuously are crucial for long-term educational success.

Assessments at Hayat School encompass five key dimensions: cognitive, affective, psychomotor, social, and spiritual. This comprehensive approach allows educators to understand student development beyond academics, addressing emotional and social growth as well (Naro et al., 2023). As Miguel et al. (2015) suggest, such an inclusive educational environment supports sustainable and responsive education tailored to each student's needs.

However, significant challenges arise in implementing assessment standards that align with the diverse developmental needs of students. Quantifying emotional, social, and spiritual growth requires deep, ongoing observation and assessment, which can be difficult to standardize (Filderman et al., 2023). This raises questions about effectively communicating assessment outcomes to parents and other stakeholders. Parental expectations present additional challenges, as some parents may lack patience or understanding of educational approaches that do not yield immediate results. They often expect rapid, visible progress, whereas the benefits of Hayat School's methods may only become apparent over the long term.

To address these challenges, Hayat School focuses on effective communication with parents, emphasizing the importance of a holistic, long-term educational approach. The school also strives to integrate more flexible and adaptive assessments that capture progress across various developmental dimensions. However, Wald & Harland (2019) cautioned that an excessive focus on non-academic aspects might detract from essential foundational knowledge. In the context of 21st-century education, these findings underscore the importance of preparing students for a rapidly changing world. The focus on holistic development equips students with critical skills such as adaptability, emotional intelligence, and global competence, which are essential for thriving in a complex, interconnected world. Educators must balance academic and non-academic development and continually adapt to the evolving educational landscape while educating the broader community about the value of holistic education.

Overall, despite these challenges, Hayat School's holistic assessment approach holds the potential for significant long-term benefits for students, highlighting the importance of an educational paradigm that meets the demands of the 21st century.

This study successfully addresses the primary objective of exploring innovations in educational assessment at Hayat School and their alignment with national assessment standards. The findings reveal that the holistic assessment approach implemented at Hayat School positively impacts student learning and engagement by emphasizing character development alongside emotional, social, and cognitive growth. This approach not only supports academic development but also prepares students for 21st-century challenges by equipping them with essential skills such as resilience, emotional intelligence, and global competence. However, challenges remain in measuring and communicating progress in non-academic dimensions, particularly in meeting parental expectations and traditional assessment standards.



Future research should explore more standardized methods for assessing non-academic dimensions and develop more effective communication strategies with stakeholders. Further studies could also investigate how this approach can be adapted and applied in other non-formal education contexts and its long-term impact on students' readiness for the workforce and community life. Ongoing research at Hayat School focuses on developing innovative assessment tools that effectively measure 21st-century skills and conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of this educational approach on alumni. Thus, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how non-formal education can serve as a catalyst for broader educational change.

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