

Holistic Assessment in Buddhist Religious Education under the Kurikulum Merdeka: A Case Study of SD Metta Maitreya, Pekanbaru

ABSTRACT

This study examines changes in assessment practices in Buddhist Religious Education following the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, with particular attention to the shift from test-based assessment toward a holistic approach that evaluates students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral development. The study responds to recent national education policy reforms in Indonesia that emphasize character formation and moral values, especially within faith-based schools. Employing a qualitative approach through a case study at SD Metta Maitreya in Pekanbaru, the research draws on classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and document analysis. The findings show a significant diversification of assessment practices through the use of affective rubrics, observation notes, reflective journals, portfolios, and narrative reports oriented toward the internalization of the values of *metta* and *karuṇā*. These changes foster positive student responses, as reflected in increased prosocial behavior, self-reflection, and moral awareness in everyday school life. The study demonstrates that holistic assessment functions not only as a tool for measuring learning outcomes but also as a pedagogical mechanism for cultivating a Buddhist moral ethos. Conceptually, this research contributes to the field of religious education by showing how learning evaluation serves as a practical space for the internalization of religious values within the policy framework of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, while also highlighting the importance of teachers' assessment literacy and institutional support in ensuring the sustainability of holistic approaches.

Keywords: Holistic assessment; Buddhist moral education; teacher assessment literacy; *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

ARTICLE INFO

Authors:

Johnny Anwar Angkasa¹

Affiliations:

¹ Institut Nalanda, Indonesia.

Article History:

Received: 10-09-2025

Revised: 20-10-2025

Accepted: 30-11-2025

Published: 31-12-2025

Corresponding author:

johnnyhung02@gmail.com

How to Cite (APA Style):

Angkasa, A. A. (2025). Holistic Assessment in Buddhist Religious Education under the Kurikulum Merdeka: A Case Study of SD Metta Maitreya, Pekanbaru. *Subhasita: Journal of Buddhist and Religious Studies*, 3(2), 169-184. DOI: 10.53417/jsb.173

Copyright:

© 2025. The Authors. License: This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).

INTRODUCTION

Changes in curriculum policy in Indonesia consistently constitute a social phenomenon with wide-ranging effects on the national education ecosystem. Since the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum (*Kurikulum 2013*), the government has

sought to improve educational quality through a scientific approach, character strengthening, and thematic integration. However, various surveys indicate that the implementation of *Kurikulum 2013* encountered significant obstacles: 74% of teachers reported difficulties in applying authentic assessment, and 63% of schools reported limited supporting resources, such as assessment tools and competency training (Astuti, Haryanto, & Prihatni, 2018). This condition reveals a gap between curriculum design and the readiness of educational actors in practice.

This phenomenon became more pronounced with the introduction of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* as a response to the need for learning flexibility and differentiated instruction. By 2023, 80% of educational institutions had adopted the *Kurikulum Merdeka* through the *Mandiri Belajar* and *Mandiri Berubah* schemes (Azizah et al., 2024). This new curriculum emphasizes teacher autonomy in designing learning strategies, including the development of more humane, continuous, and learner-centered assessments. Nevertheless, shows that 58% of teachers still do not consistently understand how to design holistic assessment instruments, particularly in the affective and character domains (Febrianningsih & Ramadan, 2023). This situation indicates the need for deeper investigation into evaluation practices within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* context.

In the context of Buddhist Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Buddha*, PAB) at the elementary school level, assessment demands become more complex because this subject aims not merely to transmit knowledge but to shape character, morality, and the internalization of noble values such as *metta*, *karuna*, and wisdom. Curriculum changes require teachers to develop assessments capable of capturing students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development in an integrated manner. However, teachers who were accustomed to test-based assessment under *Kurikulum 2013* must adapt to the more flexible and process-oriented evaluation approach promoted by the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This transition presents particular challenges, especially in faith-based schools such as SD Metta Maitreya, which possess distinctive spiritual characteristics and needs compared to general schools.

Previous studies on curriculum implementation and assessment can be grouped into three main tendencies. First, research examining the implementation of *Kurikulum 2013* and the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at the national level shows that teachers continue to face difficulties in designing authentic assessments, particularly in the domains of attitudes and character (Alimuddin, 2023; Sucipto, Sukri, Patras, & Novita, 2024; Yunita, Zainuri, Ibrahim, Zulfi, & Mulyadi, 2023). These studies emphasize the importance of improving teachers' competencies in evaluation planning. Second, studies on assessment in religious education reveal that evaluation practices remain dominated by written tests and fail to comprehensively reflect students' spiritual development (Ahmad Dhomiri, Junedi Junedi, & Mukh Nursikin, 2023; Kamalasar, Remiswal, & Khadijah, 2025). Instruments such as portfolios, behavioral observations, and reflective journals are considered promising but remain underutilized. Third, research on Buddhist Religious Education in elementary schools indicates that the teaching of Buddhist values functions relatively well, yet affective and moral assessment lacks standardization, causing teachers to experience difficulties in assessing the internalization of *Dhamma* values among students (Budiyanti, Mujiyanto, & Darma, 2023; Rahmayanti & Hartoyo, 2022; Sutini, Muawanah, & Paramita, 2023).

From these three tendencies, a significant research gap becomes evident. Few studies specifically examine how curriculum change influences evaluation practices in Buddhist Religious Education at the elementary level, particularly in Buddhist-based schools such as SD Metta Maitreya in Pekanbaru, Riau Province. Moreover, affective assessment, which constitutes the core of Buddhist education, remains insufficiently explored within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* framework that calls for a more holistic and character-based approach.

This study aims to analyze the impact of the curriculum transition from *Kurikulum 2013* to the *Kurikulum Merdeka* on evaluation practices in Buddhist Religious Education for Grade 4 at SD Metta Maitreya. Specifically, the study examines the assessment instruments used by teachers, the experiences and perceptions of teachers and students regarding curriculum change, and the challenges of implementing holistic assessment within the context of Buddhist education.

This study argues that the *Kurikulum Merdeka* encourages a significant shift in evaluation models, from test-based assessment toward authentic assessment that continuously evaluates character development, spirituality, and the practice of Buddhist values. However, this shift may generate new gaps because not all teachers possess adequate competencies and clear guidelines to objectively assess the affective domain. This argument is tested through empirical findings to assess the extent to which the new curriculum policy effectively transforms assessment practices in schools.

METHOD

The units of analysis in this study are Buddhist Religious Education teachers and Grade 4 students at SD Metta Maitreya who were directly involved in the evaluation of learning during the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The study focuses on evaluation practices implemented by teachers, teachers' perceptions and experiences, and students' responses to the new, more holistic evaluation model. By selecting individuals as the units of analysis, this study explores the dynamics of learning evaluation as they naturally emerge within the classroom context.

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, as this approach allows the researcher to obtain an in-depth and contextual understanding of curriculum transition phenomena within a specific school setting (Sugiyono, 2001). The case study design is particularly relevant for examining complex phenomena related to educational policy and its implementation at the micro level—namely, within the classroom—which cannot be reduced to isolated variables. Case studies enable a comprehensive analysis of evaluation practices, including interactions, learning processes, and the subjective interpretations of teachers and students, thereby producing rich and descriptive findings.

The data sources consist of primary and secondary data (Ajayi, 2017). Primary data were collected from three Buddhist Religious Education teachers and fifteen Grade 4 students through classroom observations and in-depth interviews. The informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active involvement in learning and evaluation processes. Secondary data were obtained

from school documents related to evaluation practices, such as teaching modules, assessment rubrics, student portfolios, character development reports, and guidelines for the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The combination of these data sources provides strong triangulation to achieve a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

Data collection techniques included participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted during learning activities to document evaluation practices, assessment strategies used by teachers, and students' behaviors and responses. Semi-structured interviews were employed to explore teachers' and students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in implementing holistic assessment. The interview guidelines were developed based on the evaluation indicators of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the principles of Buddhist education. Document analysis focused on assessment instruments, lesson plans, and records of student learning outcomes to obtain concrete evidence of changes in evaluation patterns.

Data analysis followed thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved six steps: first, familiarizing the researcher with the data through repeated reading; second, generating initial codes from interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents; third, organizing codes into preliminary categories; fourth, reviewing the consistency of categories and developing main themes; fifth, defining and naming the themes; and sixth, producing a narrative report of the findings. To ensure data validity and reliability, the study applied source triangulation, method triangulation, and theory triangulation by comparing field findings with established concepts of educational evaluation and the values of Buddhist Religious Education.

RESULTS

1. Changes in Evaluation Methods in Buddhist Religious Education

Classroom observations conducted across five meetings show that evaluation practices in Buddhist Religious Education at SD Metta Maitreya changed noticeably after the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. During the learning process, teachers no longer relied on daily quizzes and written assignments as the primary evaluation methods. Instead, teachers closely attended to students' engagement in classroom discussions, particularly when discussing *Dhamma* stories that conveyed the values of *metta* and *karuṇā*. In three observation sessions, the teacher began the lesson by reading a short Buddhist story and then invited students to retell the part they found most meaningful. The teacher actively recorded students' responses when they commented on the moral messages of the story or shared personal experiences that reflected good conduct, such as helping parents at home, sharing food with classmates, or choosing not to retaliate when teased.

In addition, several students demonstrated prosocial behavior during classroom activities, including helping peers organize their books, greeting politely before and after lessons, and maintaining calm while the teacher explained the material. The teacher recorded these behaviors in an attitude observation sheet as part of daily assessment.

These observational findings align with interview data from the three Buddhist Religious Education teachers. Teacher AN explained that she now rarely uses test scores as the main indicator of learning success and instead pays closer attention to students' behavior and habits. She stated, "I no longer assess students only through test scores, but through how they show *metta* and *karuṇā* in their daily actions, such as helping friends or maintaining classroom order" (Interview with Teacher AN, 12 January 2024). Teacher BI expressed a similar view, noting that current assessment practices emphasize interaction processes and students' real behavior, both during and beyond lesson hours. According to her, "Assessment now focuses more on the learning process rather than final test results. I observe how students behave, cooperate, and understand *Dhamma* stories in their lives" (Interview with Teacher BI, 14 January 2024). Teacher CE added that on several occasions she deliberately observed students' behavior outside the classroom, such as during breaks or in school corridors, to assess the consistency with which Buddhist values appeared beyond formal learning situations.

In addition to observation and interviews, the study also drew on reflective tasks used by teachers as part of evaluation, particularly the activity "Cerita Kebaikanku Hari Ini" (My Good Deed Today), which required students to write one good deed they performed each day. During several observations, most students described concrete actions, such as helping a friend who fell, lending stationery, or assisting parents at home. An observation on 15 January 2024 showed that the teacher read several students' reflections aloud and expressed appreciation for behaviors that embodied Buddhist values, including the courage to apologize and the willingness to share. On another occasion, the teacher invited students to discuss their reflections and asked how they felt after performing acts of kindness. This activity functioned as a means for teachers to identify concrete expressions of moral values learned by students while simultaneously documenting their development through daily reflection portfolios.

Table 1. Changes in Evaluation Methods Before and After the Merdeka Curriculum

Aspect	Curriculum 2013	Merdeka Curriculum
Assessment focus	Written test results	Learning process, attitudes, and everyday behavior
Main evaluation techniques	Daily quizzes, written assignments	Portfolios, self-assessment, behavioral observation, written reflection
Objects assessed	Mastery of subject matter	Internalization of Buddhist values (<i>metta</i> , <i>karuṇā</i> , <i>sati</i>) in action
Form of feedback	Numerical scores and brief comments	Verbal appreciation, reflective notes, and descriptive accounts of student development

The data indicate that after the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, Buddhist Religious Education teachers at SD Metta Maitreya no longer assessed students primarily through quizzes and written assignments. Instead, they evaluated how students behaved and applied Buddhist values in their daily lives.

Teachers recorded students' participation in *Dhamma* story discussions, their responses to moral messages, and prosocial behaviors such as helping peers, sharing, offering polite greetings, and refraining from retaliation. Teachers consistently reinforced these findings by emphasizing that they now prioritize learning processes, habits, and interactions rather than final test scores. Furthermore, through the reflective activity "Cerita Kebaikanku Hari Ini," students demonstrated tangible acts of kindness that teachers then acknowledged and documented as part of evaluation. Consequently, evaluation practices shifted from an academic orientation toward a more holistic, personal, and character-centered approach.

Thematic analysis of observation, interview, and document data reveals four main patterns that mark a fundamental transformation in evaluation practices in Buddhist Religious Education following the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. These patterns show that evaluation no longer functions merely as a mechanism for academic measurement, but rather as a pedagogical process integrated with character formation and the internalization of Buddhist values in students' everyday lives.

First, the data demonstrate a shift in evaluation orientation from academic achievement toward the assessment of students' character and concrete behavior. Teachers no longer regard written tests, examinations, or numerical scores as the primary indicators of learning success. Instead, they emphasize how students practice *metta*, *karuṇā*, and *sati* in daily social interactions. Classroom and school-environment observations show that simple actions—such as helping peers, behaving politely, restraining oneself from retaliating against teasing, and expressing empathy—constitute important assessment indicators. This shift confirms that the Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to view students' moral and emotional development as an integral component of learning outcomes, rather than as a supplementary aspect of cognitive achievement.

Second, the study identifies an increased reliance on direct observation as the primary evaluation technique. Teachers actively recorded students' behavior not only during formal classroom activities but also in informal contexts, including break times, peer interactions, and other school activities. Interviews with Teacher CE confirm that teachers conducted continuous observation to assess behavioral consistency across different contexts. This pattern indicates that evaluation under the Merdeka Curriculum adopts a more authentic approach, as it assesses students in real-life situations rather than in artificial conditions created by written tests.

Third, the findings reveal the emergence of self-reflection as an integral component of the assessment process. Practices such as the "Cerita Kebaikanku Hari Ini" activity provide students with opportunities to reflect on moral actions they perform at home and at school. Teachers then read and appreciate students' reflections, thereby strengthening the connection between Buddhist value learning and students' lived experiences. These reflection portfolios function as records of students' spiritual and moral development over time. This pattern demonstrates that evaluation no longer operates as a one-sided process but involves students' active awareness and participation in assessing their own behavior.

Fourth, the data show that evaluation practices have become increasingly personal and contextual. Teachers assess students based on their daily habits,

character, and interaction dynamics rather than applying uniform numerical standards. Teachers AN, BI, and CE consistently emphasize that process-oriented assessment enables them to know their students more personally. Assessment now focuses on developmental trajectories rather than final outcomes. This pattern marks a shift toward a more humanistic pedagogical relationship, in which teachers act as companions in students' moral and character development.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that curriculum reform has brought about a substantive transformation in evaluation practices in Buddhist Religious Education, shifting from test-based assessment to holistic assessment that integrates cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions. Evaluation now emphasizes processes, behavioral consistency, self-reflection, and the application of Buddhist values in daily life. The consistency of findings across all data sources—observations, interviews, and documents—indicates that changes in evaluation methods extend beyond policy discourse and have become internalized in the actual practice of Buddhist Religious Education at SD Metta Maitreya.

2. Diversification of Evaluation Instruments

The study demonstrates that evaluation instruments in Buddhist Religious Education have undergone significant diversification following the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Whereas teachers previously relied primarily on multiple-choice and essay tests as the main assessment tools, they now employ a variety of instruments, including affective assessment rubrics, behavioral observation notes, reflective journals, and documentation of learning projects related to Buddhist moral values. Teachers use affective rubrics to assess students' daily behavior through observable indicators such as cooperation skills, willingness to help peers, readiness to apologize, and the ability to demonstrate *metta* and *karuṇā* in specific situations.

In interviews, Teacher BI explained that she developed new assessment rubrics to meet the demands of holistic evaluation. She stated, "The rubrics now help me assess aspects that were previously invisible. For example, whether students can control their emotions, whether they dare to apologize, or whether they show care toward their friends" (Interview with Teacher BI, January 14, 2024). Teacher CE added that the observation notes she uses function as daily documentation of students' behavior, particularly spontaneous prosocial actions that occur both inside and outside the classroom. In addition, teachers compile student portfolios consisting of reflective worksheets, illustrated moral stories, and small projects such as posters or short narratives about acts of kindness.

Student learning reports have also changed substantially. Whereas reports previously consisted of numerical scores and brief comments, teachers now prepare narrative reports that describe the development of students' attitudes, behavior, and understanding of Buddhist values. The analyzed report documents include specific sections explaining students' achievements in the affective domain, such as "ability to demonstrate empathy," "habit of greeting politely," or "progress in controlling anger." This shift indicates that teachers no longer assess academic competence alone, but also evaluate each student's character development in a more personal and in-depth manner.

Table 2. Types of Evaluation Instruments in Buddhist Religious Education under the Merdeka Curriculum

Aspect	Description of Use	Findings
Affective Rubrics	Assess behavior and attitudes based on Buddhist values	Indicators include care for others, politeness, and willingness to apologize
Observation Notes	Record daily prosocial behavior	Teachers document students helping peers and maintaining classroom order
Daily Reflection / Journals	Students write about good deeds or moral experiences	“My Good Deed Today” contains concrete acts of kindness
Portfolios	Collection of student work related to <i>Dhamma</i> values	Kindness posters, short stories, reflective worksheets
Narrative Reports	Descriptive accounts of students’ character development	Teachers’ notes on consistency in practicing <i>metta</i> and <i>karuṇā</i>

The findings further indicate that Buddhist Religious Education teachers have significantly reoriented their evaluation practices from test-based assessment toward more holistic and contextual instruments. Written tests that previously dominated assessment practices have given way to a range of tools, including affective rubrics, observation notes, reflective journals, portfolios, and narrative reports. Through these instruments, teachers can more concretely assess how students apply Buddhist values in everyday interactions, such as cooperation, helping peers, emotional regulation, and the courage to acknowledge mistakes and apologize. Teachers also actively document spontaneous prosocial behavior and collect students’ work as evidence of character development. This shift marks a fundamental transformation, as evaluation no longer functions merely as a measurement of academic outcomes but as a means of tracing the process of internalizing Buddhist values in students’ daily lives.

Further analysis of observation, interview, and document data reveals several key patterns that characterize the diversification of evaluation instruments following the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. First, affective assessment rubrics have emerged as the primary instrument for evaluating students’ moral development. Teachers now rely on structured guidelines that include observable behavioral indicators such as cooperation skills, empathy toward peers, emotional self-regulation, and social responsibility. The use of these rubrics allows teachers to assess affective dimensions that written tests previously failed to capture, while also ensuring greater consistency through clearly defined and repeatedly observed indicators.

Second, the study identifies a significant increase in the use of portfolios as a tool for documenting students’ character development over time. Portfolios do not merely contain academic assignments, but also reflective works such as moral value posters, illustrated Buddhist stories, experience journals, and thematic project

outputs. Through portfolios, teachers can trace students' progress longitudinally rather than evaluating isolated achievements. At the same time, portfolios provide students with opportunities to express creativity and personal interpretations of teachings related to *metta*, *karuṇā*, and other ethical values.

Third, reflective journals occupy a central position in fostering students' self-awareness as part of the evaluation process. Practices such as the activity "My Good Deed Today" encourage students to reflect on their moral actions at school and at home. Through reflective writing, evaluation captures not only observable behavior but also the introspective processes underlying students' actions. Reflective journals help students connect Buddhist teachings with concrete experiences and cultivate habits of self-reflection as a moral practice. For teachers, these journals serve as authentic evidence of how deeply Buddhist values have been understood and internalized.

Fourth, changes in evaluation instruments are also evident in the transformation of learning report formats. Whereas reports previously focused on numerical scores and brief remarks, teachers now compose narrative descriptions that provide more personal and detailed accounts of students' development. Teachers record observations regarding behavioral consistency, such as habitual expressions of empathy, politeness in social interactions, and emotional self-control. Consequently, learning reports no longer merely represent academic achievement, but also portray students' moral and character development as the core of Buddhist Religious Education.

Overall, these findings indicate that the diversification of evaluation instruments has expanded teachers' pedagogical space to assess students in a more holistic and authentic manner. Evaluation now functions not only as a tool for measuring knowledge, but also as a learning mechanism that records behavior, self-reflection, and the ongoing internalization of Buddhist values. This transformation aligns with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum, which positions character and moral development as integral dimensions of educational success.

3. Students' Responses to Changes in Evaluation

Students' responses indicate that the majority expressed positive reactions to the revised evaluation model in Buddhist Religious Education. Of the fifteen students involved, twelve stated that they felt more valued because assessment no longer centered solely on quizzes or written tests but also considered their everyday attitudes and behaviors. One student noted, "I like being assessed not only by tests but also by my attitude. It makes me feel more appreciated" (Student RI, interview, 18 January 2024). Another student similarly remarked, "Being assessed based on attitude feels good. It makes me more motivated to help friends or do good deeds" (Student SE, interview, 18 January 2024). These statements reflect students' perceptions that the revised evaluation provides space to demonstrate personal qualities that standardized academic tests fail to capture.

Classroom and school-environment observations corroborate these accounts, particularly regarding the increased tendency to display prosocial behavior. During one recess session, for example, a student spontaneously helped a classmate who had dropped several books. A nearby teacher immediately recorded this action on an attitude observation sheet, indicating that students recognized that

positive behaviors received attention and appreciation. Beyond spontaneous prosocial acts, students more consistently demonstrated small but meaningful behaviors, such as greeting teachers politely, sharing stationery with peers, and maintaining classroom order during lessons. These behaviors appeared consistently across multiple observation sessions.

In addition to behavioral changes, the findings also reveal improvements in the quality of students' self-reflection through their daily journals. In these journals, students did not merely list good deeds but increasingly articulated their reasons for acting and the feelings that followed. Several reflective entries described deeper moral experiences, such as the courage to apologize, efforts to regulate emotions during conflicts, or decisions to yield in order to preserve classroom harmony. These entries indicate that students began to connect personal experiences with Buddhist values they learned in class, and that reflective instruments provided space to express moral development more authentically.

Table 3. Summary of Students' Responses

Response	Frequency	Evidence
Feeling valued	12 of 15 students	"Being assessed based on attitude feels good."
Motivation to do good deeds	10 of 15 students	Observed acts of helping peers
Increased self-reflection	9 of 15 students	Daily journals show improved reflective quality

Overall, the data demonstrate that students responded very positively to the revised evaluation model in Buddhist Religious Education. The shift from test-based assessment to evaluation that considers daily attitudes and behaviors made students feel more valued as individuals. Assessment that no longer relied exclusively on academic test results, but also attended to concrete actions and moral habits, created a more meaningful learning experience. This condition fostered increased intrinsic motivation to act ethically—both in the classroom and across the school environment—such as helping peers, practicing politeness, and avoiding conflict. Teachers' observations also recorded a higher frequency of spontaneous prosocial behaviors, indicating that the revised evaluation directly influenced students' everyday practices.

Analysis of interview data, classroom observations, and students' reflective documents reveals several major patterns in students' responses to the revised evaluation model. First, students experienced enhanced personal recognition through assessment that valued attitudes and behaviors rather than academic performance alone. Many reported that teachers' attention to their daily actions and habits made them feel acknowledged and affirmed. Because this form of evaluation aligned more closely with their lived experiences, students felt more comfortable and less pressured by assessment. This experience marks a significant shift, as evaluation no longer functioned primarily as an academic selection mechanism but as a component of guided personal development.

Second, the findings show increased motivation among students to engage in prosocial actions within the school environment. Awareness that teachers recorded

and appreciated positive behavior encouraged students to help peers, demonstrate politeness, maintain classroom order, and avoid aggressive conduct. Observational data show that these actions occurred more frequently and spontaneously, such as assisting classmates without prompts or offering greetings independently. This pattern indicates that holistic assessment influences not only cognitive dispositions but also facilitates the formation of concrete moral habits consistent with Buddhist values.

Third, the data point to improved quality of students' self-reflection. Through daily reflective journals, students moved beyond merely listing good deeds and began to articulate reasons, emotions, and moral lessons derived from their experiences. Several reflections demonstrate deeper awareness, including recognition of the need to apologize, deliberate efforts to control emotions, and conscious choices to prioritize harmony. These developments suggest that the revised evaluation model strengthens students' introspective capacities while helping them link concrete actions to Buddhist teachings addressed in class.

Fourth, the revised evaluation positively affected the emotional relationship between teachers and students. More frequent behavioral observation and immediate appreciation led students to feel personally supported and noticed. This closer interaction fostered openness, enhanced confidence, and created a safer emotional learning environment. In this context, students no longer perceived evaluation as a punitive or judgmental process, but as part of dialogical and supportive character guidance.

Taken together, these findings indicate that changes in the evaluation model under the *Kurikulum Merdeka* not only increased students' sense of being valued but also strengthened their motivation to act ethically, enhanced their reflective capacities, and reinforced pedagogical relationships between teachers and students. Students' positive responses thus provide strong evidence that holistic assessment holds substantial potential for supporting character development and the internalization of Buddhist values in primary-level Buddhist Religious Education.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* has shifted evaluation practices in Buddhist Religious Education from a test-based assessment model toward a more holistic and contextual approach. Evaluation no longer functions merely as a tool to measure cognitive achievement, but rather as a pedagogical mechanism that assesses students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development in an integrated manner. This shift is clearly reflected in the use of instruments such as portfolios, behavioral observation, reflective journals, and narrative reports, which provide students with opportunities to express their understanding of Buddhist values—such as *metta*, *karuna*, and *sati*—through concrete practices in everyday life. Students' responses, characterized by feeling more appreciated, being more motivated to engage in positive actions, and becoming more active in self-reflection, demonstrate that changes in evaluation instruments generate not only technical effects but also significant psychological and pedagogical impacts.

From an explanatory perspective, these positive changes emerge because the evaluation model promoted by the *Kurikulum Merdeka* aligns more closely with the nature of religious learning, which emphasizes experience, habituation, and the internalization of values. Action- and reflection-based evaluation enables students to understand religious teachings not merely as normative knowledge, but as processes of shaping attitudes and behavior. In contrast to score-based evaluation, which tends to measure memorization or test-taking ability, the assessment of attitudes and everyday moral practices allows teachers to capture a more comprehensive dimension of learning. These findings are consistent with educational evaluation theories that emphasize balance among learning domains and the importance of authentic assessment in measuring students' development holistically (Arikunto, 2013; Sugiyono, 2022).

Within the context of previous studies, this research reinforces Alimuddin (2023), Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, (2022); Yunita et al., (2023) findings regarding teachers' limited understanding of affective evaluation during the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum. However, this study goes further by demonstrating that teachers in Buddhist-based schools are able to adapt the principles of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* contextually to assess students' moral development through instruments that are relevant to *Dhamma* teachings. Accordingly, the flexibility of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*—which Budiayanti (2023) considered potentially problematic in the absence of adequate teacher competence—proves in this study to be transformable into more meaningful evaluation practices when supported by professional motivation and institutional backing.

Historically, these findings also reflect a broader shift in educational orientation from test-based assessment systems—traceable to colonial legacies of evaluation—toward authentic assessment that emphasizes character formation. This shift aligns with national education policy directions and manifests concretely in the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at SD Metta Maitreya. The data show that teachers no longer rely primarily on written tests, but instead employ portfolios, reflective journals, affective rubrics, and behavioral observation to assess the internalization of *metta*, *karuna*, and *sati* in students' real-life contexts. Students' positive responses strengthen the argument that authentic assessment exerts significant psychological and pedagogical effects on moral development, as also emphasized in the literature on authentic assessment reform, which highlights real-world relevance, self-reflection, and active student engagement (Indriati, Mai, & Tan, 2024; Lean & Barber, 2022; Poindexter, Hagler, & Lindell, 2015).

From a social perspective, changes in evaluation practices contribute to the formation of a more supportive and cooperative school culture. The data indicate that when positive behavior receives systematic appreciation, students become more prosocial, more self-aware, and more engaged in constructive social relationships. Increased frequencies of actions such as helping peers, sharing learning materials, and maintaining classroom order suggest that evaluation functions as a mechanism of social reinforcement. These findings correspond with studies showing that teacher recognition of positive behavior enhances prosocial actions and cooperation among students (Harikrishnan & Sailo, 2022; Wagemaker, Hofmann, & Müller, 2023). Furthermore, the use of reflective journals strengthens students' self-awareness and emotional regulation, which over time contributes to

the development of empathy and healthy social relationships (Villardón-Gallego, García-Carrión, Yáñez-Marquina, & Estévez, 2018; Wu, Chien, Huang, Chen, & Huang, 2025).

Ideologically, evaluation practices that assess *metta* and *karuna* reinforce Buddhist values as the ethical foundation of learning. Evaluation no longer focuses solely on academic achievement, but instead assesses inner quality, moral intention, and the maturity of students' character. This shift aligns with the aims of Buddhist education, which place the development of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* at the core of the learning process (Jarvis, 2013; Singh, 2017). In classroom contexts, students begin to express moral values concretely—such as the courage to apologize, the ability to regulate emotions, and empathy toward peers—demonstrating the practical internalization of Buddhist values. The narrative-based evaluation approach adopted by teachers at SD Metta Maitreya also reflects contemporary Buddhist educational paradigms that emphasize contemplation, self-awareness, and the cultivation of wisdom as primary educational goals, rather than mere content mastery (Jarvis, 2013; Klechaya & Glasson, 2017).

Nevertheless, this study also identifies several dysfunctions in the implementation of holistic evaluation. Affective assessment relies heavily on teachers' sensitivity and interpretation, which may introduce subjectivity. This finding aligns with Pastore's (2023) observation that limited assessment literacy often hinders teachers' ability to translate new evaluation paradigms into classroom practice. Additionally, resistance from some parents who remain oriented toward numerical scores indicates a gap in understanding between traditional and contemporary evaluation paradigms. Teachers' administrative workload also increases as instruments diversify, while technical support and training remain insufficient, as similarly noted by Mertler (2009) and Willis et al. (2013).

Based on these findings, this study proposes several strategic recommendations. First, teachers require intensive and continuous training in designing affective rubrics that are more objective and standardized. Second, schools should conduct systematic outreach to parents regarding the evaluation paradigm of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* to align expectations with educational goals. Third, the provision of simple digital tools can assist teachers in documenting student behavior more efficiently and consistently. Fourth, academic supervision should ensure that the diversification of evaluation instruments does not merely increase administrative burden, but genuinely functions to support students' character development in an authentic manner.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the policy shift from the 2013 Curriculum to the *Kurikulum Merdeka* has brought a significant transformation to evaluation practices in Buddhist Religious Education at SD Metta Maitreya. The main findings confirm that evaluation has moved from a test-based approach toward holistic assessment that integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of student development. Teachers no longer assess learning solely through mastery of subject matter, but also attend to students' engagement in classroom discussions, their ability to reflect on Buddhist moral values, and the emergence of spontaneous

prosocial behavior in everyday school life. Moreover, the diversification of evaluation instruments—such as affective rubrics, observation notes, portfolios, and narrative reports—has successfully created space for students to express the internalization of *metta* and *karuna* in a more authentic manner.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in its comprehensive mapping of the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* within a Buddhist-based school context, an area that remains underexplored in existing scholarship. This research offers a new perspective by demonstrating that assessment in religious education functions not only to measure learning outcomes, but also to shape students' character and moral awareness through evaluation practices that integrate *Dhamma* values. In addition, the study strengthens discussions on teacher assessment literacy by showing that teachers' readiness to understand and operate diverse evaluation instruments plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of curriculum reform.

Nevertheless, this study faces several limitations. First, subjectivity in affective assessment remains a challenge, as it depends heavily on teachers' sensitivity and interpretation of students' behavior. Second, the research scope, which is limited to a single school, requires cautious generalization of the findings. Third, the relatively limited duration of classroom observation may not have captured the full dynamics of learning processes and variations in student behavior. Therefore, future research should expand the research sites, involve a larger number of teachers and schools, and employ longer-term temporal triangulation to obtain a more comprehensive and representative understanding. Further studies should also explore strategies to enhance teachers' assessment literacy in order to support more optimal implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad Dhomiri, Junedi Junedi, & Mukh Nursikin. (2023). Evaluasi Afektif Pada Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam di Sekolah. *Khatulistiwa: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Sosial Humaniora*, 3(1), 108–117. <https://doi.org/10.55606/khatulistiwa.v3i1.971>
- Ajayi, V. O. (2017). Primary sources of data and secondary sources of data. *Benue State University*, 1(1), 1–6.
- Alimuddin, J. (2023). Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Ilmiah KONTEKSTUAL*, 4(02), 67–75. <https://doi.org/10.46772/kontekstual.v4i02.995>
- Arikunto, S. (2013). *Prosedur penelitian suatu pendekatan praktik*.
- Astuti, D. A., Haryanto, S., & Prihatni, Y. (2018). Evaluasi implementasi kurikulum 2013. *Wiyata Dharma: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Evaluasi Pendidikan*, 6(1), 7. <https://doi.org/10.30738/wd.v6i1.3353>
- Azizah, I. Z., Solihin, L., Nuraini, F., Nur, S. P., Joko, H. R., K., B. G., ... Pradhia. (2024). *Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dan Peningkatan Kemampuan Literasi dan Numerasi Peserta Didik*. Jakarta: Pusat Standar dan Kebijakan Pendidikan Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative*

- Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Budiyanti, M., Mujiyanto, & Darma, W. (2023). KEMAMPUAN GURU PENDIDIKAN AGAMA BUDDHA DALAM IMPLEMENTASI KURIKULUM MERDEKA DI SMK. *Jurnal Muara Pendidikan*, 8(2), 354–362.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.52060/mp.v8i2.1310article>
- Febrianningsih, R., & Ramadan, Z. H. (2023). Kesiapan Guru dalam Pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 7(3), 3335–3344.
<https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v7i3.4686>
- Harikrishnan, U., & Sailo, G. L. (2022). Assessment of Prosocial Behaviour of School-Going Adolescents. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine*, 47(3), 453–455.
https://doi.org/10.4103/ijcm.ijcm_1285_21
- Indriati, L., Mai, N., & Tan, H. Y.-J. (2024). Enhancing Authentic Assessment in Large-Class Design Education Through Authentic Project-Based Learning. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 23(9), 432–452. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.9.22>
- Jarvis, P. (2013). *From Adult Education to the Learning Society*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203015988>
- Kamalasari, D., Remiswal, & Khadijah. (2025). Pelaksanaan Penilaian Afektif dalam Evaluasi Pembelajaran terhadap Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam di SD Adabiah Padang. *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Dan Riset Pendidikan*, 3(4), 743–753. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v3i4.646>
- Klechaya, R., & Glasson, G. (2017). Mindfulness and place-based education in buddhist-oriented schools in Thailand. In *Weaving complementary knowledge systems and mindfulness to educate a literate citizenry for sustainable and healthy lives* (pp. 159–170). Springer.
- Lean, G., & Barber, W. (2022). Authentic Assessment in Higher Education: Applying a Habermasian Framework. *European Conference on E-Learning*, 21(1), 223–229. <https://doi.org/10.34190/ecel.21.1.913>
- Mertler, C. A. (2009). Teachers' assessment knowledge and their perceptions of the impact of classroom assessment professional development. *Improving Schools*, 12(2), 101–113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480209105575>
- Pastore, S. (2023). Teacher assessment literacy: a systematic review. *Frontiers in Education*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1217167>
- Poindexter, K., Hagler, D., & Lindell, D. (2015). Designing Authentic Assessment. *Nurse Educator*, 40(1), 36–40.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/NNE.0000000000000091>
- Rahmadayanti, D., & Hartoyo, A. (2022). Potret Kurikulum Merdeka, Wujud Merdeka Belajar di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Basicedu*, 6(4), 7174–7187.
<https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v6i4.3431>
- Singh, J. (2017). *Education (Buddhism)*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-0852-2_208
- Sucipto, S., Sukri, M., Patras, Y. E., & Novita, L. (2024). Tantangan Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar: Systematic Literature Review. *Kalam Cendekia: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan*, 12(1).
<https://doi.org/10.20961/jkc.v12i1.84353>

- Sugiyono. (2001). *Metode Penelitian Kombinasi (Mixed Methods)*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Sugiyono. (2022). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R&B* (Alfabeta, ed.). Bandung.
- Sutini, S., Muawanah, M., & Paramita, P. R. (2023). Kesulitan Guru dalam Menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka pada Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Buddha dan Budi Pekerti di Sekolah Dasar Atisa Dipamkara 1. *Vijjacariya: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Buddhis*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.69835/vjp.v10i1.298>
- Villardón-Gallego, L., García-Carrión, R., Yáñez-Marquina, L., & Estévez, A. (2018). Impact of the Interactive Learning Environments in Children's Prosocial Behavior. *Sustainability*, 10(7), 2138. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10072138>
- Wagemaker, E., Hofmann, V., & Müller, C. M. (2023). Prosocial behavior in students with intellectual disabilities: Individual level predictors and the role of the classroom peer context. *PLOS ONE*, 18(2), e0281598. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0281598>
- Willis, J., Adie, L., & Klenowski, V. (2013). Conceptualising teachers' assessment literacies in an era of curriculum and assessment reform. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 40(2), 241–256. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-013-0089-9>
- Wu, M. Y.-H., Chien, C.-Y., Huang, S.-Y., Chen, H.-C., & Huang, S.-J. (2025). The Effects of Social-Emotional Learning Program for Preschool Children on Prosocial Behaviors and Problem Behaviors. *Bulletin of Educational Psychology*. Taiwan. [https://doi.org/10.6251/BEP.202506_56\(4\).0001](https://doi.org/10.6251/BEP.202506_56(4).0001)
- Yunita, Y., Zainuri, A., Ibrahim, I., Zulfi, A., & Mulyadi, M. (2023). Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar. *Jambura Journal of Educational Management*, 4(1), 16–25. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37411/jjem.v4i1.2122>