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ASSESSING STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS WITH THE RIGHT INSTRUMENTS: AN IMPORTANT PATHWAY TO IMPLEMENTING A MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum necessitates a comprehensive understanding of student characteristics to support personalized learning experiences. This study explores the evaluation of student characteristics, assessment instruments, and their application in improving the learning process within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. To examine the evaluation of student characteristics, various assessment instruments, factors influencing instrument selection and application, and the benefits of evaluations in enhancing the learning process. This qualitative study employs a systematic literature review. The research steps include: 1) Collecting relevant literature from academic databases, focusing on journal articles, books, and government regulations related to the Merdeka Curriculum and student assessment; 2) Analyzing collected materials using content analysis techniques; 3) Synthesizing key themes and findings; 4) Validating results through data source triangulation and peer review. The study identifies key student characteristics for assessment, including cognitive abilities, learning readiness, motivation, learning styles, self-regulation, and social-emotional skills. Various assessment instruments are discussed, such as standardized tests, evaluation scales, performance-based assessments, interviews, and observations. Factors influencing instrument selection include assessment goals, student characteristics, and available resources. The benefits of student characteristic evaluations include informing adaptive instruction, providing targeted support, and monitoring student progress. Effective evaluation of student characteristics is crucial for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and supporting student-centered learning in Indonesia. The study emphasizes the need for a shift towards process-oriented assessment and highlights the importance of collaboration among educational stakeholders to create an inclusive learning environment.

Keywords : Student Characteristics, Merdeka Curriculum, Evaluation Instruments, Student-Centred Learning

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PRELIMINARY

One important factor in following the competition of the globalization era is the increase in human resources through the education sector. As a developing country with a large population, Indonesia faces difficulties in improving the quality of education to create a generation that is competent and capable of adapting to changing times. As has been found in the (Ilmi et al., 2024), one of the obstacles to the implementation of the 2013 curriculum

at the 2018 revision is the inadequacy of teachers in dealing with differences in student characteristics.

The Government of Indonesia has undertaken efforts to reform the education system by implementing the Merdeka Curriculum through the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 4 Year 2023. The Merdeka curriculum is designed to give the school decadence and independence in organizing learning according to the circumstances and needs of the students, thus maximizing the potential of each individual. Teachers are asked to understand student characteristics, such as cognitive abilities, personality, interests, motivations, learning styles, and socio-cultural backgrounds. Through this understanding, it becomes the basis for teachers to plan meaningful learning experiences that match the uniqueness of each student, thereby promoting the optimal development of each individual. (Janawi, 2019). However, understanding the characteristics of students is not an easy thing, given that each individual is experiencing complex and dynamic development.

Evaluation of student characteristics is an important part of the application of the Merdeka Curriculum, with the aim of gathering comprehensive information about the strengths, needs, and potential of each student (Alimuddin, 2023). These assessments are used by teachers to create appropriate learning plans, provide appropriate support, and help students achieve the best learning outcomes. (Encu A & Sudarma M, 2021). A careful and comprehensive evaluation of student characteristics will enable teachers to adapt learning methods to suit student diversity so that each individual can participate actively and significantly in the learning process.

Effective student characteristics assessment requires a valid, reliable, and relevant learning context. Evaluation instruments can be standard tests, evaluation scales, performance assessments, interviews, or observations. (Arifin & Latifah, 2009). The selection of instruments should take into account the objectives of the assessment, student characteristics, and available resources. Inappropriate use of instruments can result in inaccurate information and have a negative impact on learning decisions. (Mardapi, 2021). Therefore, it is essential for a teacher to have a good understanding of the principles of developing and using evaluation instruments that are appropriate to the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The application of student characteristics evaluation instruments should also be carried out carefully and professionally. Teachers as assessors must have adequate competence in terms of administration, scoring, and interpretation of assessment results. Assessment results should be thoroughly analyzed and used to draw up individual students'

profiles that cover their strengths, needs, and potential(Habsy et al., 2024). The assessment results that constitute student profiles will be the foundation for teachers in designing adaptive and responsive learning to student diversity and also be the appropriate support in facilitating the optimal development of each individual.

In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the evaluation of student characteristics should be conducted in a sustainable and dynamic manner. Teachers should carefully evaluate the effectiveness of the evaluation instruments used and make adjustments and improvements if necessary to accommodate changes and developments in students over time. (Setiawan et al., 2022). Collaboration between teachers and other stakeholders, such as parents, psychologists, and educators, is also important for sharing good practices, identifying challenges, and improving the overall quality of evaluation of student characteristics (Nur Efendi & Muh Ibnu Sholeh, 2023).Through strong collaboration and synergy, student characteristic evaluation can be a solid foundation for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum demands a paradigm shift in the evaluation of student characteristics, from an approach focused on the end result to an approach that values the learning process and the student's holistic development. (Mulyasa & Aksara, 2021). Teachers should use the results of student characteristics assessments as a basis for creating an inclusive learning environment, facilitating diversity, and supporting each student to its best potential. Evaluation of student characteristics should be seen as an integral part of the learning process, not merely as an administrative tool.

Evaluation of student characteristics with the right instruments is the key to successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. With a deep understanding of the uniqueness of each student, teachers can design meaningful learning, provide appropriate support, and help students become independent and sustainable learners. Through effective evaluation of student characteristics, we can realize the vision of the Merdeka Curriculum in producing generations that are characterized, competent, and ready to face the challenges of the future. Evaluation of student characteristics is not only about measuring but also about understanding, appreciating, and empowering the potential of each individual in a dynamic and transformative learning context.

In order to achieve optimal implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, commitment and synergies are needed from all parties involved in education, including governments, schools, teachers, students, parents, and society. Governments need to provide adequate policy support, resources, and training to teachers and schools in implementing

effective student characteristics assessment. Schools must create a culture and a system that support innovative and responsive evaluation practices for student diversity. Teachers must continue to develop their professional competence in conducting evaluations of student characteristics and using the results to design adaptive learning because the role of teachers in direct contact with students becomes very important (Lathifah et al., 2022; Widya Agustina et al., 2021). Students should be actively involved in the process of self-assessment and self-reflection so that they can understand their own strengths and areas of development. Parents and the community must also be involved as partners in supporting the holistic development of students.

(Paulus et al., 2023), in his research, mentions that there are still problematic obstacles to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The importance of developing a character evaluation instrument for students in the era of globalization is urgent and urgently needs to be implemented (Nuha Sun'an et al., 2023). With strong collaboration and synergy among all stakeholders, the evaluation of student characteristics in the context of the Merdeka curriculum can be a catalyst for meaningful educational transformation. Through comprehensive, responsive, and sustainable characteristic assessment, we can build a solid foundation to produce a generation that is characterized, competent, and ready to face the challenges of the future. Student characteristic assessment is not only about measuring achievement but also about building potential and empowering each individual to be an adaptive and transformative lifelong learner. This requires the use of appropriate instruments in the evaluation of student characteristics.

METHODS

This research uses the method of literature study. Reasons for using this method to enable in-depth exploration of the evaluation of student characteristics in the context of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. The stages undertaken in this research include the collection of information, analysis, and synthesis of information from various relevant literary sources. The sources of data are scientific journal articles, books, and government regulations related to the Merdeka Curriculum and student characteristics assessment. Scientific journal articles are sourced from leading academic databases, such as Scopus and Google Scholar, with publication periods lasting 10 years to ensure relevance and up-to-date information. The books used as sources of literature include textbooks, guidelines, and reference books written by experts in education and assessment. Government regulations, ministerial regulations, and policy documents related to the Merdeka

Curriculum. The data collection process is carried out through searches with relevant keywords, such as "student characteristic assessment," "assessment instrument," "Merdeka Curriculum," and "Indonesia education". This search is done using Publish or Perish, and Google Scholar. The search results are then filtered based on the relevance of the title, abstract needs, and the availability of full access to literary sources. Subsequently analyzed using content analysis techniques. Researchers carefully read each literary source and identify themes related to the evaluation of student characteristics in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. These themes include the importance of evaluating the characteristics of students, the types of evaluation instruments, considerations in the selection and use of the instrument, and the utilization of the results of evaluations to optimize learning. After the analysis process, the researchers synthesized information by integrating key themes that emerged from various literary sources. This synthesis aims to produce a comprehensive understanding of the evaluation of student characteristics in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Next, the researchers identify the gaps in knowledge and make recommendations for further research. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the research results, researchers apply the technique of triangulation of data sources by comparing information from various literary sources. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research results, the researchers applied the technique of triangulation of data sources by comparing information from various literary sources with the following summary:

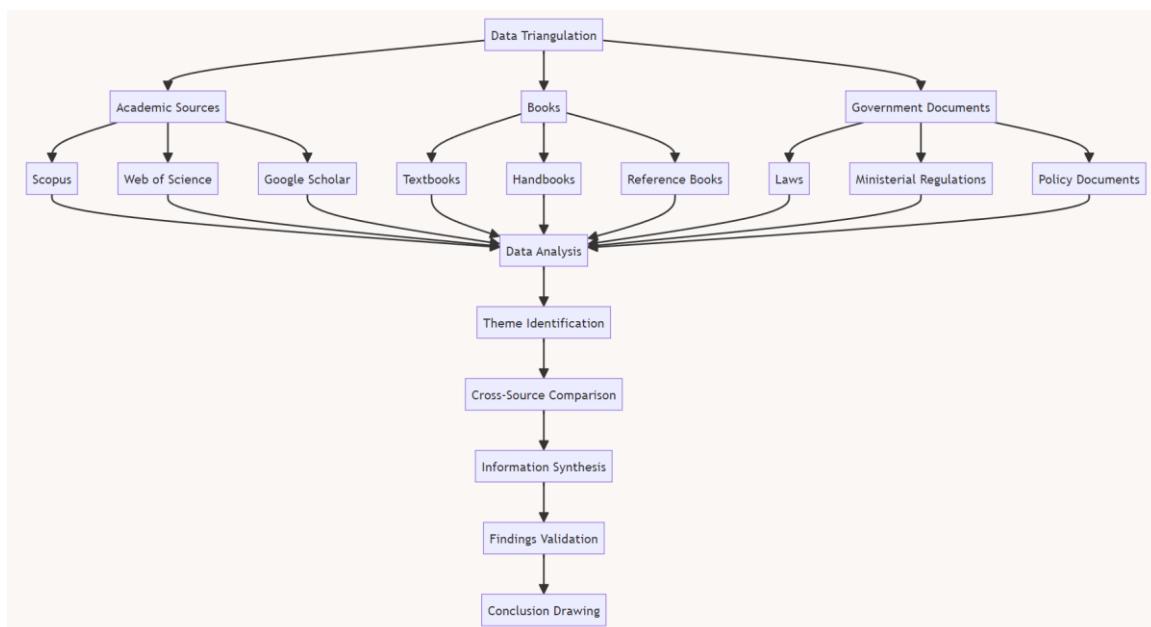


Figure 1. The data triangulation process

The last thing done in this study was to discuss with peers and experts in the field of education to get feedback and validate the research findings. Through a systematic and

rigorous method of literature study, this research is expected to provide in-depth insight into the evaluation of student characteristics as an important foundation in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. The results of this research can be the basis for further development of policies, practices, and research in the field of education in Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Main Student Characteristics to Be Assessed

Understanding the characteristics of students is one of the most basic things that a teacher must master in the learning process. Each student has their own uniqueness, based on different backgrounds, abilities, interests, and learning styles. Teachers are said to be effective when they are able to recognize and understand the characteristics of their pupils, so that they can design learning according to the needs and potential of each individual. (Purnawanto, 2023).

The evaluation of student characteristics becomes an important element in gathering comprehensive information about students. The assessment not only covers cognitive aspects but also covers various dimensions of student development, including personality, interests, motivation, and socio-emotional skills (Arifin & Latifah, 2009) By obtaining a complete picture of students' characteristics, teachers can optimize the learning process and help each student achieve optimal learning outcomes.(Purnawanto, 2023)

Some of the main student characteristics that need to be assessed by the educational experts include:

1. Cognitive Abilities: Gardner (2011)explains that cognitive abilities are various types of intelligence, such as linguistic, mathematical-logical, spatial, kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence.
2. Learning readiness: Evaluation of learning readiness helps teachers design learning that matches the student's level of development. Vygotsky et al., (2012) emphasized the importance of assessing the student's proximal development zone (ZPD), i.e., the distance between the actual level of development and the level of potential development, with the guidance of a more skilled person.
3. Motivation and engagement: Assessment of motivation and involvement can be done through behavioral observations, interviews, or questionnaires, such as the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) (Vallerand et al., 1992). According to Deci & Ryan (2000), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation affect student involvement in learning.

3. Learning styles: Fleming & Mills, (1992) developed a VARK model (Visual, Aural, Read/Write, Kinesthetic) to assess student learning preferences. An understanding of learning styles can help teachers design instructions that accommodate student diversity.
4. Self-regulation: Zimmerman (2000) emphasizes the importance of self-regulatory ability in learning, which includes self-planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation. (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1988).
5. Social-emotional skills: Goleman (1995) highlights the role of emotional intelligence in student success, which includes self-awareness, emotional management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. (Stough et al., 2009)
6. Contextual factors: Bronfenbrenner (2009) emphasizes the influence of ecological environments, such as families, schools, and communities, on student development. Assessment of contextual factors can include family background, social support, and resources available to students.

A thorough assessment of all of these student characteristics can be valuable information for teachers in planning effective and responsive learning for student diversity (Tomlinson, 2014). To support the optimal growth and development each student, it is necessary to select valid and reliable evaluation instruments as well as carefully interpret the results.

Assessment of the various characteristics of these students can be done comprehensively using a variety of appropriate methods, such as standard tests, assessment scales, observations, interviews, and performance assessments. The choice of the correct assessment method depends on the purpose of the assessment, the characteristics of the aspects assessed, and practical considerations in its implementation. (Pramana dan Putra, 2019).

A deep understanding of student characteristics enables teachers to design differential learning strategies, provide appropriate support, and create an inclusive learning environment (Encu A & Sudarma M, 2021). Thus, the evaluation of student characteristics becomes an important foundation for realizing student-centered learning and facilitating the optimal development of each individual.

Type of Assessment Instrument

One step to optimizing learning activities and experiences is to understand the characteristics of students. Each student has its own uniqueness in him. Effective teachers are able to create a comfortable learning environment and use a variety of appropriate evaluation instruments to gather information about their students' strengths, needs, interests, and learning styles. (Yani et al., 2023). Choosing the right evaluation instrument aims to gain a thorough and accurate understanding of the student's characteristics. There are various types of evaluation instruments that can be used to evaluate the characteristics of students and their respective advantages and limitations. An understanding of the various types of instruments allows teachers to choose the tools that best suit the purposes of their assessment and their learning context.

1. Standard Testing; Standard tests, such as cognitive tests or personality inventory tests, are often used because of their established reliability and validity (Wicaksono, 2022). Examples of standard tests include the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) to measure cognitive abilities and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to assess personality types. Standard test results should be carefully interpreted and integrated with information from other sources to get a more complete picture of the student.
2. Scale of evaluation; Assessment scales can be filled in by teachers, parents, or students themselves to assess student behavior, attitudes, and skills in a variety of contexts. (Wildan, 2017). Examples of assessment scales include the Behavioral Assessment System for Children (BASC) to assess student behavior and emotions, as well as the Motivation Strategy for Learning Questions (MSLQ) to measure student motivation and learning strategies. The evaluation scale can provide information about student characteristics that may not be visible through standard tests.
3. Performance-Based Evaluation; Performance-based assessments, such as assessments of essays, projects, or portfolios, enable students to demonstrate their understanding and skills in an authentic context (McTighe et al., 2020). A well-designed section is essential to assessing student performance fairly and consistently. Performance-based assessments can provide information about student creativity, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking skills.
4. Interviews and observations; Interviews and observations can produce rich qualitative data about students' perspectives, experiences, and behavior. (Handoko et al., 2024). Interviews can be used to explore students' interests, aspirations, and challenges. Observations can provide insights into social interaction, class participation, and student involvement in various learning activities.

Every assessment instrument has its advantages and disadvantages. The use of comprehensive and multi-method assessment approaches, as well as the combination of various types of instruments, can provide a more complete and accurate picture of student characteristics (Retnawati et al., 2017). Rigidity as well as urgency in considering the evaluation objectives, student characteristics, and available resources are a must when choosing the most suitable instrument. Interpretation of evaluation results should also be carried out carefully, considering context and integrating various data sources to support valid decision-making on student learning and development. (Yani et al., 2023)

The selection and use of appropriate evaluation tools is a crucial step in the evaluation process of student characteristics. Appropriate evaluation instruments enable teachers to gather valid, reliable, and relevant information about various aspects of student development.(Yusuf, 2023). But choosing an effective assessment instrument is not easy. All that needs to be done is to consider various factors to ensure that the instrument selected is in line with the objectives of the assessment, student characteristics, and available resources.(Riscaputantri & Wening, 2018) . Here are some considerations in choosing and using assessment instruments:

- 1) The assessment goal: The selected instrument must align with the assessment objective, whether it is for screening, diagnostic, formative, or summative purposes.
- 2) Student characteristics: The evaluation tool must be consistent with the level of development, cultural heritage, and language of the student.
- 3) Aspects to be considered are available resources, such as time, cost, and expertise required to perform the administration and interpretation of the evaluation instrument.
- 4) Teachers must be trained to be able to use evaluation tools properly and apply the results to the learning process.

Assessing student characteristics can provide valuable information to enhance individual learning and development. By paying attention to students' strengths, needs, interests, and learning styles, teachers can plan more responsive and effective teaching (Widyawati & Rachmadyanti, 2023). However, in order to fully utilize the potential of the assessment results, teachers must strategically and ethically use the information. Using student character evaluation involves designing differential learning, providing appropriate support, and monitoring student progress over time. Here are some of the ways in which student characteristic assessment results can be used (FUCHS & FUCHS, 2006; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Stecker et al., 2005; Stiggins, 2017; Tomlinson, 2014):

1. Adaptation of the instruction to the characteristics of the student. This method allows teachers to design responsive teaching approaches according to the individual needs of each student. This requires unique strategies, such as giving different tasks or learning resources based on students' level of readiness, interests, and learning styles. Consideration of student diversity so that teachers can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.
2. Providing appropriate assistance: The results of the student characteristics evaluation can help teachers identify students who need extra support. For example, students with learning difficulties can get a remedial program that suits their needs, while more talented students can engage in enrichment activities to explore their potential to the fullest. In certain situations, assessments may direct students to obtain counseling or additional support.
3. Observing student progress by conducting a regular evaluation of student characteristics can provide an overview of student progress over time. Through the observation process, teachers can monitor the student's progress, identify areas that need extra attention, and adjust teaching methods. Monitoring student progress also allows teachers to give more detailed and meaningful feedback to students and their parents.

When using student characteristics evaluation, it is important for teachers to carefully consider the learning context and individual needs of each student. Evaluating the student's attributes with a variety of appropriate instruments is crucial to understanding the individual's peculiarities and enhancing their learning benefits. Teachers need to choose and use assessment tools that match the objectives, characteristics of students, and existing resources. Student characteristics assessment enables responsive instruction planning, appropriate support, and student development monitoring. In addition, involving students and parents in talking about test scores and their impact on learning is also important. By working together and being honest, teachers can use the results of student character evaluations to create a more responsive, supportive, and efficient learning environment for all students. Continuous evaluation and introspection of evaluation methods are also required to ensure that the instruments used remain appropriate and effective in meeting the needs of various students.

Administration and Interpretation Student Characteristics Assessment: Best Practices for Valid and Meaningful Results

Proper assessment administration is a key factor in obtaining valid and reliable results. A person serving as a teacher or assessor staff must undergo comprehensive training

on administrative procedures and assessment standards. This training should cover various aspects such as preparing evaluation materials, giving clear instructions to students, recording responses accurately, and conducting deductions consistently. (Mertler, 2017) emphasizes the importance of adequate training for assessors, noting that it is crucial to ensure assessments are conducted consistently and in accordance with established procedures.

It is important to pay attention to the test environment so that students can be in optimal condition. The assessment room should be quiet, comfortable, and there should be no disturbances that could interfere with the student's concentration. Students with special needs should be given appropriate accommodation, such as extra time or the use of auxiliary technology, in accordance with their individual educational plans. According to (Salvia et al., 2013), the correct test environment and proper adjustment are essential to ensure that the evaluation results reflect the student's actual abilities.

Meaning evaluation of student characteristics should be done carefully and consider many factors. Understanding the limitations of the assessment instruments used and the margin of error is important. Small differences in grades between students may not be relevant to the characteristic differences assessed. Therefore, interpretation should be comprehensive, taking into account context and other information about students, such as academic achievement, teacher observations, and input from parents. According to Popham, (2017), it is important to interpret the assessment results carefully and take into account various sources of information to understand students in depth.

A student's characteristic assessment should not be used as a fixed label or a comprehensive overview of a student. Instead, these results should be seen as a starting point for further exploration and discussion about the strengths, needs, and areas of growth for students. Providing information to students and families should be done carefully and focused on helping students develop positively. Effective feedback should have clear, specific descriptions, and guidance on the steps to be taken, as well as emphasis on student progress and efforts rather than just on the outcome. (Stiggins, 2017).

In the context of inclusive education, interpretation of student characteristics of evaluation results should also take into account factors such as student culture, language, and experience. The norms and expectations used should include all groups of students without any bias. Working with other experts, such as school psychologists or special education experts, can provide additional insights in interpreting results and planning appropriate interventions. (Shepard et al., 2018) emphasizes the importance of

interprofessional collaboration, stating that "interprofessional collaboration is crucial to ensure accurate interpretation of assessment results and the development of effective support plans for students".

Based on the comparison presented in the table, here are some key limitations and suggestions for future research:

Aspect	Current Research	Comparison to Literature	Limitations and Suggestions
Assessment Administration	Emphasizes comprehensive training for assessors and proper test environment	Aligns with Mertler (2017) and Salvia et al. (2013) on the importance of training and appropriate testing conditions	Future research could explore the impact of different training methods on assessment quality and consistency
Interpretation of Results	Advocates for careful interpretation considering multiple factors and avoiding fixed labeling	Consistent with Popham (2017) on the need for comprehensive interpretation	Further studies could investigate the long-term effects of different interpretation approaches on student development
Feedback and Communication	Emphasizes careful communication with students and families, focusing on positive development	Aligns with Stiggins (2017) on the importance of effective feedback	Future research could examine the effectiveness of various feedback methods in different cultural contexts
Inclusive Education	Considers cultural, linguistic, and experiential factors in assessment interpretation	Supports Shepard et al. (2018) on the importance of interprofessional collaboration	More research is needed on developing culturally responsive assessment tools and interpretation methods

Through applying the appropriate administrative principles of judgment, interpreting the results carefully and thoroughly, communicating significantly with students and families, and working with other professionals, teachers can use the characteristics of students to the maximum to support their development.

These limitations and suggestions provide a roadmap for future researchers to build upon the current findings and further enhance our understanding of student characteristic assessment in diverse educational contexts

CONCLUSION

Evaluation of student characteristics requires the use of valid, reliable, and relevant learning contexts, such as standard tests, assessment scales, performance-based assessments, interviews, and observations. In choosing the appropriate evaluation tool, consideration should be given to the objectives of the evaluation, the nature of the student, and the availability of resources. Teachers should be skilled in managing the assessment tool and interpreting the results carefully while taking into account the situation and information of other students. Student character evaluation must be used wisely in planning responsive learning, providing appropriate assistance, and monitoring the progress of students on a regular basis. To improve the quality of evaluation of student characteristics and create an inclusive learning environment, collaboration between teachers, other professionals, and stakeholders is required..

Ways to enhance student character assessment include: (1) creating training programs for teachers to enhance their ability in using evaluation tools; (2) incorporating technology to simplify data collection and analysis; (3) engaging students and parents in assessment for better collaboration; (4) designing tools mindful of cultural diversity and unique student needs; and (5) conducting regular evaluation cycles for ongoing monitoring of student progress. Nevertheless, it is important to consider certain restrictions: (1) inadequate resources in certain schools can impede the execution of thorough assessments; (2) addressing the cultural bias in current evaluation instruments is crucial; (3) effectively managing the heightened workload for teachers due to more extensive evaluation procedures is essential; (4) maintaining strict confidentiality of student data becomes increasingly important with greater information collection; and (5) addressing the difficulties in meeting the needs of students with special needs during evaluations requires careful attention.

To overcome these constraints, further research is needed in several areas, including the development of cost-effective evaluation methods for schools with limited resources, the validation of culturally biased evaluation tools, strategies to integrate evaluation into teaching routines without burdening teachers, the development of strong data security protocols, and designing more inclusive evaluation techniques for students with a range of special needs. By addressing these challenges through sustained research and innovation, student character evaluation can be a more effective tool for supporting personalized learning and improving overall educational outcomes.

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