

# Beyond Metrics in Christian Education: A Conceptual-Hermeneutic Study of Reflective Evaluation and Kierkegaardian Selfhood in the Indonesian Context

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## ABSTRACT

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Contemporary evaluation practices in Christian education are increasingly shaped by standardized metrics and outcome-driven assessment, reducing faith-based learning to measurable performance while neglecting spiritual formation, vocation, and relational life before God. Although existing studies acknowledge the role of spirituality, they often remain descriptive and lack a theologically grounded evaluative framework. This study develops an integrative model of evaluation rooted in Christian spiritual formation, reorienting assessment from external achievement toward reflective, Christ-centered transformation. Adopting a qualitative conceptual and hermeneutic approach, the study engages Ignatian spirituality—particularly the *Examen*—and Søren Kierkegaard’s account of selfhood to construct a normative framework. The findings suggest that the *Examen*, interpreted through Kierkegaardian inwardness and authenticity, offers a structured mode of reflective assessment centered on discernment, gratitude, repentance, and vocational becoming before God. Moving beyond approaches that treat spirituality as supplementary or rely on quantitative proxies, this study advances a novel synthesis that formalizes spiritual discernment as evaluative practice. It concludes that evaluation in Christian education should shift from measuring achievement to discerning faithful becoming, thereby advancing a transformative paradigm for pedagogy and practice.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary educational systems are increasingly governed by standardized assessment regimes and performance metrics that prioritize comparability, accountability, and measurable outcomes. Global policy frameworks, including those advanced by the OECD and UNESCO, have

reinforced this orientation through large-scale assessments and competency-based benchmarks designed to ensure quality and global competitiveness. Such an emphasis has led to "metric fixation," according to Muller (Muller, 2018). Numerical indicators have become proxies for educational quality, often at the expense of deeper, more holistic understandings of learning and personal growth (Miedema, 2021). Although these tools are intended to ensure accountability and comparability, they often reduce education to easily quantifiable outcomes, neglecting the emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of the learner's journey (Biesta, 2019).

From a theoretical perspective, this shift reflects a narrowing of educational purpose. Drawing on Biesta framework (2020), this trend has contributed to the learnification of education, where the focus shifts from formation and meaningful engagement to measurable outputs (Biesta, 2020). In spiritual or existential educational traditions, the human person is not merely understood as a performer of tasks but as a moral and spiritual being in development. In Christian spiritual education, where transformation, inwardness, and vocation are central, this type of reductionism creates dissonance. Furthermore, scholars have identified psychological and social costs associated with overemphasizing standardized assessments. Such costs include increased student anxiety, teacher burnout, and a narrowed curriculum that prioritizes test preparation over critical reflection and ethical development (Au, 2007; Stavholm et al., 2021). Such outcomes are especially problematic in pluralistic societies like Indonesia, where education ought to engage diverse spiritual and cultural identities meaningfully.

Alternative evaluative frameworks are urgently needed in light of these challenges—frameworks that honor the complexity of human selfhood and the formative, relational nature of education. The Ignatian Examen, enriched by Søren Kierkegaard's existential vision of selfhood, offers one such possibility. Instead of focusing on performance outcomes, it encourages reflective and spiritual discernment, shifting the focus of evaluation toward transformation rather than mere achievement. This trend has contributed to what Biesta (2020) terms the "learnification" of education—where the focus shifts away from formation and meaningful engagement toward measurable outputs (Biesta, 2020). The human person, especially in spiritual or existential traditions of education, is understood not merely as a performer of tasks but as a moral and spiritual being in development. In Christian spiritual education, where transformation, inwardness, and vocation are central, such reductionism creates dissonance.

Compared it using previous research that had discussed the topic I mentioned, namely:

Table 1. Reflective Spiritual Assessment

Aspect	Previous Studies	This Research
<b>Object of Evaluation</b>	Focus on children's spirituality and intelligence (Hill & Woolley, 2022; Zhou et al., 2024) or religious curriculum (Sporre), without an existential evaluative framework (Sporre, 2023)	Presents an integrative evaluative model combining Ignatian <i>examen</i> and Kierkegaard's existential view of the self
<b>Evaluation Methodology</b>	Mostly qualitative-descriptive or standard quantitative instruments	Offers a formal reflective-spiritual framework grounded in theological-philosophical principles, focusing on value-based discernment
<b>Contextual Scope</b>	Classroom-based religious education or global studies with limited cultural grounding	Centers on Christian education within the Indonesian context, addressing cultural-spiritual plurality and

Aspect	Previous Studies	This Research
<b>Depth of Existential Dimension</b>	Touches on meaning and spirituality but not integrated into structured assessment	educational policy tensions (Zajda & Zajda, 2021)  Places existential questions, self-awareness, and vocational identity as core components of educational evaluation

Although several recent studies have highlighted the importance of spiritual and existential dimensions in education, there are still significant gaps in their application to formal evaluation frameworks. In their qualitative study in Australia, Hill and Woolley (2022) explored teachers' perceptions of the spiritual dimension in children's education (Hill & Woolley, 2022). While the teachers recognized the importance of these aspects, they found it challenging to incorporate them into an evaluation system that prioritizes cognitive and standardized approaches (Palmer, 2017). Another study by Zhou et al. (2024) examined the relationship between spiritual and emotional intelligence and academic achievement via meta-analysis (Zhou et al., 2024). The results showed a positive correlation; however, the approach remained limited to standardized, quantitative instruments that did not address the reflective or transformational dimensions of students. Meanwhile, Sporre (2023) examined how religious education curricula in Scandinavian countries address children's existential questions about the meaning of life and moral issues (Sporre, 2023).

Instead of developing an evaluation system that can measure the process of searching for personal meaning, this study focuses on the content of the curriculum. Compared to these three studies, your research offers a contribution that is both different and more profound. Incorporating the reflective framework of the Ignatian examen and Kierkegaard's existential thought, it not only emphasizes the importance of spirituality in education but also develops an evaluative model that directly assesses learners' inner awareness, self-reflection, and spiritual transformation. Unlike previous research that tends to be descriptive or based on quantitative data, your approach is conceptual-normative, which elevates evaluation from mere outcome assessment to a process of self-discovery and authentic personality formation. Moreover, with a special focus on the plural and religious context of Indonesia, this research emphasizes the importance of evaluation rooted in a personal relationship with God as well as a deep ethical awareness—an aspect that has not been explored much in previous studies. Therefore, your research not only fills a gap in the literature but also offers an alternative evaluative model that is spiritually, philosophically, and contextually relevant.

Both globally and within the Indonesian setting, current educational systems predominantly utilize outcome-driven evaluation practices that emphasize observable behaviors, academic performance, and measurable competencies. This limited focus reduces learning to an efficiency- and accountability-driven transactional process, neglecting the inner transformation essential to holistic human development. Such reductionism is particularly problematic within the field of Christian spiritual education. In this context, education is not just about acquiring knowledge or demonstrating skills; rather, it encompasses nurturing the whole person in relation to God, others, and oneself. However, current evaluation tools fail to account for formative aspects of learning, such as self-awareness, vocational discernment, ethical sensitivity, and spiritual depth. Consequently, students could excel externally while remaining internally disconnected, lacking a coherent sense of purpose, integrity, or authentic identity.

The absence of frameworks capable of assessing personal transformation, inner life, and existential growth reveals a significant gap in the discourse on educational evaluation. Standardized assessments, though useful for certain educational objectives, cannot capture quiet processes such as reflection, repentance, spiritual struggle, and relational awakening. In response to this deficiency, there is an urgent need for an evaluation model that considers not only what students do but also who they are becoming. Integrating the Ignatian Examen and Kierkegaard's philosophy of selfhood, this study reorients educational evaluation toward inward transformation, relational authenticity, and vocational clarity, especially in the context of Christian education seeking alignment with SDGs 4 and 16.

Table 2: Research Objectives

Objective	Explanation
To propose Ignatian <i>examen</i> as a framework for reflective and spiritual evaluation	Introduce <i>examen</i> as a structured spiritual practice that can guide learners in evaluating their inner life, intentions, and growth in relationship with God.
To interpret <i>examen</i> through Kierkegaard's concept of selfhood and authenticity	Use Kierkegaard's existential philosophy to deepen the <i>examen</i> , framing it as a path toward becoming one's true self before God, beyond external performance.
To contextualize this model within global educational trends, Indonesian settings, and SDGs	Adapt the integrated model to respond to challenges in modern education – such as standardization – especially in the Indonesian context and in alignment with SDG 4 and 16.

This research has three objectives, each of which addresses a key gap in current educational evaluation practices. First, the study proposes using the Ignatian Examen as a reflective and spiritual framework for educational assessment. Instead of focusing solely on outcomes and observable behavior, the Examen encourages students and educators to engage in an intentional process of interior discernment, examining their thoughts, desires, actions, and relationship with God. The examen reframes evaluation as a spiritual discipline rather than a performance measure.

Second, the research aims to reinterpret the Examen through Søren Kierkegaard's existential notions of selfhood and authenticity. Kierkegaard's emphasis on inwardness, despair, and the call to become oneself before God provides a valuable philosophical perspective through which to understand how learners recognize their vocation and identity. Thus, evaluation becomes an existential process – a journey toward becoming one's authentic self rather than conforming to external expectations.

Third, the study contextualizes this integrative model within global educational trends, Indonesia's unique religious and cultural setting, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' broader goals—particularly SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). Aligning spiritual-evaluative practices with international goals and local realities, the model provides a comprehensive, contextually relevant alternative to traditional evaluation approaches.

How can the Ignatian examen, enriched by Kierkegaard's existential philosophy, serve as a spiritually grounded model of educational evaluation that responds to contemporary challenges in Indonesia and beyond, while contributing meaningfully to SDG 4 and SDG 16?

The Ignatian Examen is a spiritual practice rooted in the tradition of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. It was originally formulated as part of his Spiritual Exercises. There are two main forms: the particular

Examen, which focuses on specific habits or faults a person seeks to improve, and the broader general Examen, a daily reflection on one's spiritual and moral state. The Examen has historically evolved from a moralistic tool for monitoring sin into a contemplative process aimed at cultivating deeper spiritual awareness and openness to divine grace. At its core, the Examen is not just a method of self-scrutiny but rather a rhythm of prayerful reflection that invites individuals to discern God's presence and movement in ordinary daily life events.

Several key values are central to this practice: discernment, recognizing and responding to subtle inner spiritual movements; gratitude, grounding reflection in humility and joy; interiority, attentiveness to inner thoughts, emotions, and desires; and alignment with God's will, the ultimate goal of reorienting life toward divine purposes. Together, these values foster a form of evaluation that transcends external performance and encourages ongoing transformation. In an educational setting, the Ignatian Examen provides a profound framework for students and educators to engage in meaningful spiritual self-assessment, fostering not only knowledge, but also wisdom, purpose, and moral integrity.

Søren Kierkegaard's profound existential philosophy provides a theoretical foundation for reimagining educational evaluation as a spiritual and formative process. Central to his thought is the concept of selfhood, encapsulated in the existential imperative, as he wrote in 1849, "to become oneself before God" (Kierkegaard, 1980). This journey toward authentic selfhood is a deeply spiritual endeavor marked by inwardness, personal responsibility, and divine relationality, not merely a psychological one. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard describes despair as a misrelation within the self and a failure to rest transparently in the power that established it—God. Thus, despair becomes not just a psychological malady but also an existential disconnection from the divine source of identity (Louw, 2022).

In Kierkegaard's framework, another vital concept is the leap of faith: the existential act of surrendering to the divine without objective certainty. Recently, scholars have interpreted this concept as an educational paradigm, inviting learners to step beyond rational calculation into trust-based transformation (Margetts et al., 2024). Thus, educational evaluation is not only about measuring achievement; it also involves discerning the learner's existential stance regarding truth, selfhood, and the divine. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's critique of institutional religiosity and public recognition resonates with contemporary critiques of performative spirituality and technocratic educational models. As Magnusson (2016) points out, Kierkegaard opposed any form of Christianity that equated inward faith with external conformity (Magnusson, 2016). In educational terms, these ideas suggest moving away from bureaucratic assessments and toward evaluative practices that are grounded in personal reflection and authenticity. In the Indonesian context, religious education tends to lean toward doctrinal formalism. Kierkegaard's call for subjective spiritual engagement invites a liberating shift toward personal accountability before God (Setiawan, 2023).

This paper integrates the insight of Kierkegaard with the Ignatian test to propose a model of educational evaluation centered on spiritual formation, existential awareness, and relational authenticity. Thus, Kierkegaard's philosophy offers a radical alternative to the results-oriented paradigm of contemporary education by positioning evaluation as a sacred journey toward becoming fully oneself in the presence of God. Integrating the Ignatian Examen with Søren Kierkegaard's existential philosophy provides a robust spiritual and philosophical framework for evaluating education as an inner transformative process. In the Ignatian tradition, examen is a daily reflective practice emphasizing self-awareness, gratitude, contrition, and aligning one's will with Divine will (Campanario et al., 2022). In a Kierkegaardian framework, the Examen is not merely a devotional ritual, but an ontological process toward self-authenticity — "becoming oneself before God."

This process emphasizes inner transformation over external conformity, an idea strongly emphasized in Kierkegaard's philosophy. Kierkegaard argues that individuals caught up in an ethical-aesthetic existence live based on public opinion and external judgment, which ultimately leads to existential despair (see Kierkegaard, "Stages on Life's Way," 1849/1980). Practicing the examen in an existential spirit invites individuals to dismantle the mechanisms of social conformity and develop an interior awareness of the purpose of life, the meaning of suffering, and their relationship with God (Plante, 2022). For teachers, this integration plays an essential role in shaping their professional identities. Within the context of Christian teacher education, the practice of daily reflection on the Examen, alongside an understanding of personal vocation as conceived by Kierkegaard, enables teachers to perceive their professional responsibilities not merely as work, but as an existential purpose to be embraced in a relationship with God. Krause (2021) study confirms that spiritual evaluations, such as the Examen, shape teachers who are more reflective and authentic and who have a transformative impact on their learning communities (Brante & Krause, 2021).

In a global educational context increasingly caught up in performativity and instrumentalism, this integration offers an alternative paradigm. Rather than assessing results, evaluation becomes about assessing the inner movement towards wholeness. The discernment and spiritual awareness processes in the Examen philosophically correspond to the Kierkegaardian "leap of faith," in whose framework individuals act based on an existential relationship with the transcendent rather than on objective guarantees (Sutherland, 2022). Thus, the examination becomes a form of ascetic practice that guides the individual toward true and relational self-formation as both a student and an educator.

Although recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of spirituality, meaning-making, and non-cognitive dimensions of learning, existing approaches remain limited in at least three ways. First, they tend to adopt descriptive or correlational methods, treating spirituality as an additional variable rather than a foundational dimension of evaluation. Second, they rely on psychometric or qualitative proxies that do not adequately capture processes such as reflection, repentance, discernment, and relational awareness. Third, they lack a coherent philosophical and theological grounding that can integrate these dimensions into a structured evaluative framework. In other words, there remains a critical gap: the absence of an operationalizable reflective-spiritual evaluation model that is both conceptually rigorous and pedagogically applicable.

In response to this gap, this study proposes an integrative model of educational evaluation that reorients assessment from external measurement toward reflective and spiritually grounded formation. It does so by bringing into dialogue the Ignatian Examen—a structured practice of daily spiritual reflection—and Søren Kierkegaard's existential philosophy of selfhood. The Examen offers a practical methodology for cultivating discernment, gratitude, and moral awareness, while Kierkegaard provides a philosophical account of inwardness, authenticity, and the task of becoming a self before God. By integrating these traditions, the study develops a framework in which evaluation is understood not as judgment of performance, but as a process of discerning who the learner is becoming in relation to God, others, and oneself.

This study contributes to the field in three key ways. First, it advances the conceptual distinction between measurement, formation, and subjectification by grounding evaluation in a theological-existential anthropology. Second, it offers a structured and operationalizable model of reflective-spiritual assessment that moves beyond descriptive accounts of spirituality. Third, it situates this model within the Indonesian educational landscape, addressing the tension between progressive policy reforms and persistent metric-driven practices. In doing so, the study provides both a theoretical and practical foundation for reimagining evaluation in Christian education as a transformative, relational, and spiritually attentive process.

## 2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative conceptual–hermeneutic methodology to construct a normative framework for reflective–spiritual evaluation in Christian education. More specifically, it adopts a Gadamerian hermeneutic approach (philosophical hermeneutics), which emphasizes historically situated understanding, dialogical interpretation, and the fusion of horizons between classical texts and contemporary educational concerns. This approach is appropriate for examining theological–philosophical sources not merely as historical artifacts but as living interlocutors in present educational discourse.

Data sources consist of primary and secondary texts. Primary sources include Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* (as the foundation of the Examen) and key works of Søren Kierkegaard, particularly *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Stages on Life’s Way*, selected based on their explicit treatment of selfhood, inwardness, and existential becoming. Secondary sources include recent scholarship in philosophy of education, theology, and assessment studies, selected through relevance to three criteria: (1) discussion of spirituality in education, (2) critique of metric-based evaluation, and (3) exploration of subjectivity or formation.

The analytical procedure follows four systematic stages to enhance methodological clarity and replicability. First, textual interpretation is conducted through close reading of primary texts to identify core concepts (e.g., discernment, inwardness, authenticity). Second, thematic synthesis integrates these concepts across Ignatian and Kierkegaardian frameworks, identifying convergences and tensions. Third, conceptual reconstruction translates these synthesized insights into educational categories, particularly in relation to evaluation theory (measurement, formation, subjectification). Fourth, contextual application situates the reconstructed framework within the Indonesian educational setting, engaging current policy dynamics such as *Kurikulum Merdeka* and assessment reform.

To ensure analytical rigor, the study employs three validation strategies. First, philosophical coherence, ensuring internal consistency between theological and existential claims. Second, comparing multiple primary and secondary sources to avoid single-text bias. Third, conceptual transparency, whereby each analytical step—from interpretation to framework construction—is explicitly articulated and theoretically justified.

Although not intended for statistical generalization, this methodological design enhances replicability by providing a clear workflow that can be applied to other philosophical–theological integrations in educational research. Through this structured hermeneutic process, the study produces a conceptually robust and contextually relevant model of reflective–spiritual evaluation.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### **The Evaluation in Global Educational Trends: An Existential–Spiritual Critique**

Contemporary global education systems are strongly shaped by standardized assessment regimes that prioritize measurable outcomes, comparability, and accountability, as reflected in large-scale international assessments. Empirical studies indicate that such systems contribute to curriculum narrowing, increased test-orientation, and heightened student anxiety, reinforcing what has been described as the dominance of performativity and “learnification,” where educational success is reduced to measurable outputs. Within this paradigm, evaluation privileges qualification while marginalizing deeper processes of formation and subjectification. This imbalance is particularly problematic in Christian education, where learning is not merely oriented toward cognitive achievement but toward the formation of the self in relation to God, others, and moral responsibility.

The limitation of metric-based evaluation thus lies in its inability to capture interiority, ethical discernment, and spiritual transformation. In response, this study positions the integration of the Ignatian Examen and Kierkegaardian selfhood as a corrective framework that redefines evaluation as a structured process of discernment, shifting the focus from performance measurement to formative becoming.

This tension is further intensified in the Indonesian context, where educational reform through *Kurikulum Merdeka* promotes holistic learning, autonomy, and character formation, yet institutional practices remain dominated by standardized assessment, accreditation pressures, and public ranking systems. Empirical evidence suggests that religious education often prioritizes doctrinal mastery and examination performance over the cultivation of spiritual awareness and ethical reflection, resulting in a gap between cognitive knowledge and lived faith. Moreover, Indonesia's pluralistic and religiously diverse society requires an educational approach capable of integrating personal faith formation with social responsibility and interreligious sensitivity. However, current evaluative instruments lack the capacity to assess such dimensions, reinforcing a structural disjunction between policy ideals and classroom realities. Within this context, the need emerges for an evaluative framework that is both spiritually grounded and pedagogically applicable, capable of translating holistic educational goals into assessable practices.

In my role as an educational researcher focusing on the ethical and spiritual dimensions of global learning systems, I have noticed a prevalent trend in educational evaluation practices that emphasizes the quantification of learning outcomes and external validation. The meaning of evaluation has narrowed from a process of shaping the whole person to a simple means of measuring academic performance. This system is sustained by technocratic logic and market needs and ignores the inner and spiritual dimensions of learners. In many countries, including Indonesia, evaluations now rely heavily on standardized tests, numerical scores, and objective, quantifiable achievements. This practice reflects what Biesta (2020) calls "learnification," wherein the purpose of education is reduced to content delivery and outcome measurement (Biesta, 2020). Such a system is unable to capture the complexity of character building or students' spiritual relationships with the world or God. Zhao's (2022) study shows that pressure to achieve quantitatively has created a climate of fear and anxiety in East and Southeast Asian schools, including those in Indonesia (Zhao et al., 2022).

I contend that an approach to pedagogy that is overly focused on results diminishes the transformative potential of education. This approach fails to foster self-awareness, existential honesty, and the courage to live authentically—central tenets of Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy. According to Hunter (2023), transformational education involves a deeply reflective process that changes one's perspective on the world and oneself (Amy Hunter, 2023). In this context, I see that the Ignatian Examen, which invites daily reflection on one's actions, motivations, and the presence of God, connects spiritual transformation with reflective learning. I have also observed that a culture of performative evaluation, where teachers and students feel compelled to "role-play" to meet the expectations of the system, has led to spiritual exhaustion, depression, and a loss of meaning in the learning journey (Stavholm et al., 2021). In Kierkegaard's framework, it represents a form of despair, a disconnect between the self and true existence before God. Overemphasizing performance creates an inauthentic self, which does not reflect the deepest calling of human beings. Research by Tokuhama-Espinosa (2010) also shows that students living in a performative culture experience a loss of ownership of the learning process itself (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2010).

Combining the Ignatian examen rooted in spiritual awareness and Kierkegaard's thoughts on inwardness, I see an opportunity to build a more humane, reflective, and spiritual model of evaluation. This means that evaluation is not just about what students do, but who they are becoming. The educational process should lead to existential courage—the courage to look inward, face anxiety, and

step out in faith (Margetts et al., 2024). I believe that this is a form of evaluation that is not only personally meaningful but also contributes to the achievement of SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 16 (peaceful and inclusive institutions). My focus as an education researcher is the relationship between spirituality and national education policymaking. I see the Indonesian context as offering unique complexities. Indonesia has a strong religious heritage, yet it remains stuck in an overly doctrinaire and bureaucratic pedagogical approach. Consequently, the evaluation of religious education often neglects the reflective and transformational elements that are fundamental to spiritual education.

My observations of the national curriculum reveal that religious education in Indonesia tends to emphasize dogma and memorization without providing students with the critical and reflective tools necessary to internalize values. A study by Idris et al., (2022) revealed that religious education teachers prioritize mastering national exam materials over building moral and spiritual character (Idris et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a gap between cognitive religious knowledge and an authentic spiritual life. Approaches such as the Ignatian Examen and Søren Kierkegaard's thoughts on inwardness can provide a more in-depth framework for nurturing students to become spiritually authentic individuals, rather than merely formally obedient ones.

I also see an inherent contradiction between the progressive policies of Merdeka Belajar—which emphasize autonomy, creativity, and meaningful learning—and an evaluation system that is still highly dependent on standardized testing. According to Sari et al., (2023) research, Merdeka Belajar's policies have not fully permeated practice because schools and teachers are tied to public perceptions of test scores and accreditation (Sari et al., 2023). The challenge of evaluation lies in creating a system that remains accountable but provides space for personal growth and spiritual discernment. Reflective approaches, such as exams, can bridge the gap between policy ideals and pedagogical realities.

An evaluation model that measures not only cognitive achievement but also students' spiritual and personal growth is necessary in Indonesia. This is an increasingly urgent issue in a competitive global context where students experience mental stress and identity crises. Examen and Kierkegaard's concept of selfhood before God are relevant here, as they help students reflect on their deepest identity, not merely their achievements (Kierkegaard, 1946; Kotler & Westbrook, n.d.).

### **Reframing Evaluation through Examen and Kierkegaard: A Dialogical Reflection**

I asked, reflecting on the idea, whether evaluation ought to be outcome-based. The first idea questioned the dominance of the global education system that relies on grades, rankings, and performance. In such a system, students become statistics, not individuals. However, the Ignatian tradition offers an alternative through the Examen: "Evaluation can be a process of meaning, not numbers." The Examen invites students and teachers to reflect on gestures, moral choices, and the presence of God in daily life. Research affirms that the examen is not only a spiritual practice but also a pedagogical tool with the capacity to transform evaluation from an outcome-based model into a more personalized, contextualized, and meaning-based assessment (Plante, 2022).

Another skeptical voice asks, how do we measure something inward? Kierkegaard answers this question unequivocally through the concept of inwardness: what is most authentic in human beings is not always visible from the outside. Spiritual evaluation is not about what is visible; rather, it is about self-awareness and having a true relationship with God. Plante (2022) states that interiority, as understood by Kierkegaard, is a key element in forming a complete identity (Plante, 2022). Therefore, evaluation should pay more attention to students' relational awareness and how they live the values, not just memorize them.

"[And] who has the right to judge?" the third idea asks again, questioning authority in the evaluation process. This is where the collaborative idea emerges: teachers and students are not opponents in the assessment system but co-participants in discernment. They walked together, like two

pilgrims who help each other read God's footsteps on the journey of learning. Transformative education demands the role of the teacher as a companion of the soul, not just a deliverer of material (Margetts et al., 2024). Examen, when applied in this context, becomes a space for inner dialogue between students, teachers, and God. Reframing evaluation in this framework means not only changing the measurement tools but also changing the relationship between the actors. Evaluation is not a moment of punishment but rather an opportunity for self-discovery (Cutri et al., 2021).

### Contribution to the SDGs

As an education researcher dedicated to ethical and spiritual transformation within the global education system, I have found that the integration of the Ignatian Examen and Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy not only holds pedagogical value but also contributes significantly to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). "Quality education is not just about access but about meaning." Spirituality therefore calls educators to look beyond enrollment statistics and graduation rates. In this context, I argue that the Examen, a daily practice of self-reflection in light of God's presence, is an excellent holistic learning tool. It shapes not only cognitive skills but also emotional, ethical, and spiritual awareness. The examen facilitates inclusive, reflective learning attentive to the deepest dimensions of human beings (Plante, 2022). Similarly, integrating the Kierkegaardian value of authentic selfhood enables students to become true learners, not just value-seekers.

Another study by Zynuddin et al. (2023) shows that education that promotes non-cognitive skills such as empathy, self-control, and relational awareness is more effective in shaping students' character than academic training (Zynuddin et al., 2023). This is aligned with the spirit of SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education that does not forget the formation of the soul. I realize that in a social context full of fragmentation, education has a crucial role in shaping individuals who are just, reflective, and able to build peace. Examen provides space for the practice of discernment—conscious decision-making and moral consideration—which is needed in shaping a generation of ethical and responsible leaders. In the Kierkegaardian framework, individuals reflecting on their lives honestly before God would be more likely to develop social and moral responsibility.

Gaztambide-Fernández et al., (2022) points out, the concept of inwardness in education fosters collective consciousness and solidarity rather than egoism (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2022). This is the foundation of strong institutions—not institutions that are powerful, but institutions whose members are accountable and self-aware. Westbrook (2025) posits that peace-building education necessitates schools as moral communities, defined by collective reflection, dialogical justice, and a commitment to shared growth (Kotler & Westbrook, n.d.). In this sense, Examen is not merely a personal exercise but rather a social habitus that shapes a school culture of compassion and justice. Examen supports the achievement of SDG 16 by fostering peaceful, just, and mutually accountable communities of learners.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that prevailing metric-driven evaluation systems are insufficient for capturing the formative aims of Christian education, particularly the development of selfhood, spiritual discernment, and relational integrity before God. By integrating the Ignatian Examen with Kierkegaard's concept of existential selfhood, the study offers a structured reflective-spiritual evaluation model that shifts assessment from measuring performance to discerning processes of becoming. Moving forward, this framework calls for concrete implementation within Christian educational practice through the redesign of assessment tools, including reflective journals,

discernment-based rubrics, and dialogical teacher–student evaluation processes. Educational institutions are encouraged to align assessment systems with formative goals by embedding spiritual reflection as a regular pedagogical practice rather than a supplementary activity.

At the policy level, the study suggests that ongoing reforms—particularly within contexts such as Indonesia’s *Kurikulum Merdeka*—ought to be moved beyond rhetorical commitments to holistic education by incorporating evaluative indicators that account for ethical, spiritual, and relational development. Future research should focus on empirical testing of the proposed model across diverse educational settings, including the development of validated assessment instruments and comparative studies examining its impact on student formation and institutional culture. Ultimately, reimagining evaluation as a practice of discernment has the potential to cultivate learners who are not only academically competent but also spiritually grounded, ethically responsible, and capable of contributing to just and reflective educational communities.

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