

THE RELEVANCE OF KI HAJAR DEWANTARA'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy in the context of 21st-century education, particularly in the development of character and value-based humanistic education. In light of the rapid advancement of technology and the increasingly dynamic demands of education, it was considered essential to reassess the principles proposed by Ki Hajar Dewantara. A literature review method was employed using a qualitative approach to analyze scholarly works related to his thoughts and their application in contemporary education. The findings indicated that Ki Hajar Dewantara's principles—such as Tut Wuri Handayani, the Among system, and the Tri Pusat Pendidikan (Three Centers of Education)—remained highly relevant for 21st-century education. These values supported character formation, learner autonomy, and an educational approach that emphasized independence, which were all crucial in addressing the challenges of education in the digital age. The study concluded that Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy had made a significant contribution to the development of a more humanistic and relevant education system. The application of his values was found to strengthen character education and provide a strong foundation for the development of more inclusive curricula and educational policies in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a vital instrument in shaping the character of a nation (Sabariah, 2023), developing students' potential, and equipping them with the necessary skills to face the future. In the context of globalization and technological advancement, education is expected not only to produce intellectually capable graduates but also to foster adaptability to the ever-evolving demands of the times (Aini et al., 2024). The challenges of the 21st century require an educational system that cultivates critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity—collectively known as the 4Cs (Dewi et al., 2024).

In addressing this era, Indonesia's national education system must revisit the intellectual legacy of its educational pioneers, particularly Ki Hajar Dewantara. As the Father of Indonesian Education, Ki Hajar Dewantara proposed an educational philosophy that emphasizes learning freedom, character formation, and alignment with students' nature and era (Fanani, I., 2018). His educational concepts are not only rooted in national values but also progressive in responding to changing times.

Ki Hajar Dewantara's most well-known philosophy is embodied in the maxim, "Ing ngarsa sung tuladha, ing madya mangun karsa, tut wuri handayani", which means that a leader sets an example in front, builds spirit in the middle, and provides support from behind (Marliani & Djadjuli, 2019). This principle aligns with 21st-century learning approaches that position teachers as facilitators rather than sole sources of information (Sa'diyah, 2020), highlighting the importance of learner autonomy and intrinsic motivation.

Literature reviews reveal that several studies have explored Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy in the context of character education (Yusuf, 2024), the Merdeka curriculum (Alimuddin, 2023), and culture-based educational management (Alfiyanto, 2020). However, few studies have explicitly linked his philosophical values to the framework of 21st-century competencies, which currently serve as the foundation for curriculum development and learning strategies (Mansir et al., 2021).

For example, the research conducted by Hidayat (2021) focuses more on the historical aspects of Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought, while Kusumawati (2024) emphasizes the integration of local values into the national curriculum. Meanwhile, the connection between the noble values of national education and global challenges such as digital literacy, systems thinking, and 21st-century skills remains underexplored.

This research seeks to fill that gap by bridging Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy with the needs of contemporary education. While global education offers many modern frameworks, the integration of local wisdom remains a powerful force in preserving national identity (Heckie et al., 2025). By re-examining the relevance of his philosophy, we not only honor the nation's intellectual heritage but also adapt it creatively to modern contexts.

This study offers novelty by not merely highlighting the philosophical or historical dimensions of Ki Hajar Dewantara's ideas but also by aligning them with global competencies such as information literacy, digital literacy, and lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2016). In this regard, 21st-century education cannot be separated from socio-cultural contexts, as consistently emphasized by Ki Hajar Dewantara through his principle of "education rooted in national culture" (U. U. R., 2003).

The primary research question addressed in this study is: "How relevant is Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy in addressing the challenges of 21st-century education?" This study aims to examine the relationship between the values embedded in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought and the current educational needs, particularly in character development, potential enhancement, and 21st-century skills.

This research is significant as it can serve as a reference for designing educational policies and strategies that are grounded in local values while being responsive to global challenges. It also promotes the reorientation of curricula to become more contextual and relevant to students' needs (Zubaidah, 2016). Consequently, national education will not only produce competent graduates but also individuals with strong character and cultural identity.

To conclude this introduction, it is essential to underscore that Ki Hajar Dewantara's ideas are not outdated relics, but rather enduring sources of inspiration that can be modernized and applied creatively. This study aspires to formulate an integrative framework that combines local wisdom and global competencies to shape an educational system that is holistic, sustainable, and perpetually relevant.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using the library research method, as it aimed to examine in depth the educational thought of Ki Hajar Dewantara and its relevance to 21st-century

education principles. The research design was descriptive-analytic, which involved describing, analyzing, and interpreting the educational values found in Ki Hajar Dewantara's works and comparing them with the needs of contemporary education, such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and technological literacy.

The sample of this research consisted of books written by Ki Hajar Dewantara, journal articles, conference proceedings, and other relevant scholarly literature, particularly those published between 2000 and 2024. Literature was selected based on inclusion criteria, namely, having a focus on Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thought and 21st-century education concepts, and being sourced from reputable academic publications. Popular literature lacking conceptual depth was excluded.

The primary instrument used was a data extraction form, which included columns to record essential information such as themes, main ideas, and the relevance of concepts to modern educational competencies. Data were collected through structured searches in databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Garuda, and Perpustakaan. The initial selection was made by reviewing titles and abstracts, followed by a full-content review to ensure topic relevance.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis techniques, which identified key themes from Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought, such as Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, culture-based education, and the role of teachers as liberators. These themes were then compared to the 21st-century education framework provided by UNESCO and the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek). The aim of the analysis was to demonstrate how Ki Hajar Dewantara's intellectual legacy remains relevant and can be integrated into the modern educational system.

RESULTS

1. The Philosophical Relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Thought in 21st-Century Education

The findings of this study revealed that Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy is not merely of historical value, but highly relevant to the demands of 21st-century learning. His core ideas—Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha (in front, setting an example), Ing Madya Mangun Karsa (in the middle, building motivation), and Tut Wuri Handayani (at the back, giving encouragement)—underscore the essential roles of educators as role models, facilitators, and motivators. These principles align closely with modern learning models that emphasize collaboration, empathy, and participatory leadership (Latifah & Irawan, 2024).

2. Compatibility with 21st-Century Learning Skills (4Cs Framework)

In the context of 21st-century education, Dewantara's values serve as foundational principles for creating an educational ecosystem that nurtures independent learning, character development, and adaptability in a globalized era. His concept of "merdeka belajar" (freedom to learn) is consistent with constructivist learning theory, which positions students as active agents in the learning process (Sugrah, N., 2019). This perspective aligns with the 4Cs framework—critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration—which are considered core competencies in contemporary education.

3. Cultural-Based Education and National Identity

The literature also indicates that Ki Hajar Dewantara's emphasis on culture-based education significantly strengthens character education and national identity. Various studies suggest that contextual education rooted in local cultural values can effectively address modern challenges, particularly the erosion of cultural roots in the face of globalization (Siregar et al., 2024). Therefore,

his ideas remain vital as a philosophical and practical foundation for designing a curriculum that is both contextual and humanistic.

4. Implementation in National Education Programs

This study found that many of Ki Hajar Dewantara's principles have already been adopted in national education initiatives, such as the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile. Core values like independence, mutual cooperation, and critical reasoning are emphasized in these frameworks, reflecting the living presence of his ideas in contemporary educational practice. Thus, his legacy is not only a cultural heritage but a continuing influence in current pedagogical approaches. According to Arifin and Putri (2022), these implementations demonstrate the operationalization of Dewantara's philosophy in modern policy frameworks, validating its adaptability to contemporary needs.

5. Academic Support and the Need for Innovation

Out of 25 academic sources reviewed, 20 affirmed that Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy can be effectively integrated into current educational frameworks, provided that approaches are updated and adapted to present-day contexts. The remaining five highlighted the necessity of reinterpretation and innovation to ensure that his values are not merely symbolic but operational and applicable in digital and multicultural classrooms. As emphasized by Nurgiyantoro (2021), innovation rooted in tradition is key to ensuring that Dewantara's values remain applicable in dynamic educational landscapes.

6. Challenges in Practical Application

The study also identified several challenges in fully implementing Ki Hajar Dewantara's ideas. These include limitations in human resources, school organizational culture, and administrative pressures. Many educators lack a deep philosophical understanding of his concepts, resulting in partial and inconsistent classroom implementation. This underlines the need for continuous professional development that addresses not only technical skills but also ideological and philosophical foundations. Research by Mulyasa (2020) emphasizes the necessity for reflective teacher training that is aligned with national educational philosophy.

Overall, the findings affirm that Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy holds strong relevance in the 21st century—pedagogically, philosophically, and in terms of character formation. However, strengthening this relevance requires contextualized approaches that address contemporary challenges such as digitalization, globalization, and social diversity. Hence, his legacy should not only be honored historically but also evolved into a foundational philosophy for the future of education. As concluded by Winataputra (2021), contextualizing national educational ideals is essential for their sustainability and relevance in a globalized world.

DISCUSSION

Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy positioned students as active subjects in the learning process. The concept of Tut Wuri Handayani emphasized the educator's role in providing encouragement and guidance from behind, enabling students to grow independently. This approach aligned with 21st-century learning principles that emphasized the development of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills.

In the context of modern education, the values advocated by Ki Hajar Dewantara remained highly relevant. For instance, the *Among* system, which emphasized freedom and responsibility in learning, could be integrated into the current curriculum to promote student autonomy. Additionally, the principle of the *Tri Pusat Pendidikan*—family, school, and community—

highlighted the importance of collaboration among multiple stakeholders in supporting the educational process (Sukri & Trisakti Handayani, 2016).

A previous study by Niyarci (2021) showed that Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy was relevant in shaping student character in the digital age. The study highlighted that values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility—taught by Ki Hajar Dewantara—served as foundational elements for forming moral character in 21st-century learners. This suggested that while the context of the times had changed, core educational values remained vital and relevant.

The implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's ideas in modern education was also evident in Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasized student-centered learning, allowed flexibility in content selection based on student interests and talents, and promoted strong character development. This approach was consistent with Dewantara's educational principles.

However, challenges remained in integrating Ki Hajar Dewantara's ideas into the current educational system. One of the key obstacles was the lack of deep philosophical understanding among educators, which hindered the effective implementation of his values in classroom practice. Additionally, administrative pressures and a densely packed curriculum often made it difficult for educators to apply more humanistic and student-centered approaches.

This study also found that although many of Ki Hajar Dewantara's values were relevant to 21st-century education, adaptation and reinterpretation were necessary to ensure effective application in today's digital and global context. For example, the use of technology in education needed to be aligned with Dewantara's principles to maintain a focus on character building and student independence (Mulyana, 2022).

Furthermore, it was essential to involve all stakeholders—families, schools, and communities—in supporting the implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's values in education. Collaboration among these parties could create a conducive learning environment that supported students' holistic development (Sukri & Trisakti Handayani, 2016).

In the context of globalization, the local values taught by Ki Hajar Dewantara could serve as a counterbalance to the influx of foreign information and culture. By instilling strong cultural and character values, students could develop a solid identity and adapt to change without losing their sense of self (Kurniawan & Agung, 2021).

The limitation of this study lay in its use of a literature review approach, which may not fully reflect the practical implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy in real-world educational settings. Therefore, further research using empirical methods is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of applying Dewantara's values in today's education system.

As a partial conclusion, Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thought remained relevant and offered significant contributions to the development of education in the 21st century. However, efforts were needed in terms of adaptation, educator training, and stakeholder collaboration to effectively integrate these values into modern educational systems.

CONCLUSION

This study found that Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thought—particularly the concepts of Tut Wuri Handayani, the Among system, and the Tri Pusat Pendidikan—has strong relevance in the context of 21st-century education. These values support character development, learning autonomy, and student-centered education, aligning with the demands of the digital era which emphasize creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. Thus, Ki Hajar's ideas are not merely historical, but also offer solutions to the challenges of modern education. The implications of these findings highlight the importance of integrating Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational values into

current policies, curricula, and learning practices. Theoretically, this research contributes to strengthening a national educational philosophy that is relevant to global challenges. Practically, the findings can serve as a foundation for developing a more humanistic and contextually responsive educational model.

This study recommends further empirical research to evaluate the implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's values in real-world educational settings. Follow-up studies are also encouraged to explore the synergy between educational technology and culturally grounded educational principles. Overall, this research affirms that Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy remains vital and should continue to be revitalized to realize meaningful and character-based national education.

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