



Revealing the Legacy of Ki Hajar Dewantara: Reforming Educational Policies in the Contemporary Context

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the enduring relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy in shaping modern educational thought and policy. Dewantara, the founder of the Taman Siswa movement, advocated for a holistic approach to education that integrates intellectual, moral, and physical development while emphasizing the preservation of local cultural identity amidst global influences. His principles, Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha (leading by example), Ing Madya Mangun Karsa (fostering initiative), and Tut Wuri Handayani (providing supportive guidance), serve as the foundation for creating inclusive, culturally responsive, and character-driven educational systems. In response to contemporary challenges such as inclusivity, equity, and the impact of globalization, this article examines how Dewantara's framework can be adapted to modern education. By integrating local cultural values and global competencies, Dewantara's philosophy offers a comprehensive model for policy reforms that empower educators, foster student agency, and nurture ethical, globally-minded individuals. Through a qualitative approach combining historical analysis and literature review, this study highlights the practical application of Dewantara's principles in contemporary educational settings and outlines a policy framework to guide educational transformation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of global education, the demand for pedagogical frameworks that emphasize holistic development, cultural inclusivity, and ethical grounding has intensified. As education systems worldwide grapple with the challenges posed by globalization, digital transformation, and social inequality, there is a renewed interest in philosophies that promote the integration of local wisdom with modern educational demands (Uyuni & Adnan, 2024; Yetti, 2024). One such philosophy is that of Ki Hajar Dewantara, a pioneering Indonesian educational thinker and founder of the Taman Siswa movement. Dewantara's vision emphasized the development of the whole person, intellectually, morally, and socially, through a culturally grounded and humanistic approach to education (Ferary, 2021; Muthoifin, 2024). His principles, famously expressed in the triad “Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha” (leading by example), “Ing Madya Mangun Karsa” (working among students to foster initiative), and “Tut Wuri Handayani” (guiding from behind), continue to resonate within contemporary educational discourse and offer a counterpoint to overly standardized, technocratic models of learning.

Globally, education systems are increasingly under pressure to meet international benchmarks while preserving national identity and cultural distinctiveness (Alhazmi & Almashhour, 2024; Cleveland et al., 2022). This tension is particularly pronounced in postcolonial societies, where imported education models often overlook indigenous epistemologies (Clarke, 2021; Nguyen, & Chia, 2023). Dewantara's educational philosophy, rooted in anti-colonial values, cultural emancipation, and civic responsibility, offers an important lens through which to reimagine educational equity and relevance in the 21st century (Darmawan, & Sujoko, 2019; Ferary, 2023). While global frameworks such as Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2017) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 on quality education) emphasize inclusive and equitable learning, they often fail to address the deep cultural and philosophical foundations that underlie meaningful reform. Dewantara's thought contributes to filling this conceptual gap by advocating for learner-centered, values-driven education that reflects the lived experiences of students and communities.

Recent literature has emphasized the growing need for education systems to respond to rapid technological, socio-political, and ecological change (Moravec & Martínez-Bravo, 2023; Marouli, 2021). In this context, Dewantara's principles offer both philosophical and practical tools for developing responsive educational policies. His insistence on aligning formal education with local culture, values, and community engagement echoes contemporary calls for culturally responsive pedagogy (Barnes & Marlatt, 2022; Stein et al., 2024). Moreover, Dewantara's model prefigures many ideas found in critical pedagogy and progressive education, including learner autonomy, moral development, and experiential learning (Ferary, 2021; Sukiastini et al., 2023). Such alignment reinforces the global relevance of his thought, not only within Southeast Asia but also across educational systems striving for equity and contextual relevance.

One of the most pressing contemporary issues in global education is the achievement of inclusivity and equity, particularly in multicultural and multilingual classrooms (Buchs & Maradan, 2021). In response to this, Dewantara's pedagogy emphasizes respect for individual potential (potensi kodrati), the cultivation of moral character, and the recognition of each student's cultural background as a foundation for learning (Ferary, 2021; Widiyanto & Purnomo, 2023). His approach centers the learner as a member of both a family and a community, highlighting the importance of social cohesion and civic responsibility in the

educational process. In an era where global education often leans heavily on standardized assessments and competitive metrics, Dewantara's philosophy champions a more humanistic and culturally responsive paradigm, one that emphasizes local wisdom, ethical growth, and community-based learning.

However, despite its potential, Dewantara's educational framework remains underexplored in international scholarship. Much of the existing research is localized, descriptive, and lacks analytical engagement with global educational theory (Hartman, 2023). This creates a significant research gap: there is limited empirical work that critically examines how Dewantara's principles can be systematically integrated into current educational reforms and policies, particularly in the context of globalization and digital transformation. Furthermore, there is a lack of comparative studies that position Dewantara's ideas alongside global educational thinkers, such as Dewey, Montessori, or Freire, who similarly advocate for learner-centered and value-based education.

This study investigates to fill that gap by conducting a critical exploration of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy, focusing on its contemporary relevance for educational thought and policy in the 21st century. Specifically, the research aims to examine how Dewantara's principles can inform the development of educational systems that are inclusive, culturally grounded, and ethically oriented. It will assess how his ideas can be adapted to address urgent issues such as character education, multicultural inclusion, and the protection of cultural identity amid increasing globalization. This recontextualization is essential in informing both national policy in Indonesia and broader educational discourse internationally.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in philosophical and historical inquiry, aiming to explore the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy in contemporary educational discourse. Qualitative research was chosen due to its suitability for examining complex, context-dependent phenomena that cannot be fully understood through quantitative metrics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, this study adopted a documentary and historical analysis approach, which allows for the systematic interpretation of both primary and secondary sources within their socio-cultural and political contexts (Bowen, 2009). This methodology was considered appropriate for capturing the depth, nuance, and enduring relevance of Dewantara's thought, particularly in relation to ongoing global educational challenges such as equity, inclusivity, and cultural sustainability. The research was interpretive in nature, aiming to construct meaning from texts and historical artifacts by linking Dewantara's original ideas to contemporary theoretical frameworks and policy debates.

2.2. Data Sources and Selection

The data corpus for this study consisted of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included Ki Hajar Dewantara's original writings, such as his essays, letters, speeches, and educational treatises published through the Taman Siswa institution. These texts are foundational for understanding his philosophical stance and educational ideals as they were articulated within the anti-colonial struggle and nation-building efforts of early 20th-century Indonesia. Secondary sources comprised scholarly interpretations, historical analyses, and academic commentaries on Dewantara's legacy, drawn from peer-reviewed journals,

academic books, dissertations, and reputable archival publications. These sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the academic discourse surrounding Dewantara's philosophy.

The selection process followed purposeful sampling, a common strategy in qualitative research, which involves identifying information-rich sources that illuminate the phenomenon under study. Texts were included if they directly engaged with Dewantara's philosophical principles, his conceptualization of education and culture, and their applicability to either historical or contemporary educational contexts. Both Indonesian and English language sources were considered to ensure a comprehensive, multilingual perspective on his work. The inclusion criteria prioritized historical authenticity, philosophical depth, and relevance to current educational discourse, particularly regarding themes such as character education, cultural identity, and educational reform.

2.3. Analytical Approach

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis supported by historical contextualization. This method involved close reading, thematic coding, and interpretive synthesis of textual data to identify key themes, recurring concepts, and philosophical patterns across the corpus. The process was iterative and reflexive, beginning with open coding to explore emergent ideas, followed by axial coding to organize themes around core constructs in Dewantara's philosophy, such as *budi pekerti* (character and ethics), cultural nationalism, and community-based learning. Analytical memos were used throughout to document interpretive decisions and reflect critically on the evolving understanding of the data.

To preserve historical integrity, the analysis was grounded in a contextualist paradigm, which emphasizes the socio-political and cultural conditions under which Dewantara developed his ideas. This allowed the researchers to interpret his texts not as isolated philosophical statements, but as responses to the colonial and cultural dynamics of his time. At the same time, the study adopted a constructivist stance, enabling connections to be drawn between Dewantara's legacy and the needs of present-day education systems. Analytical validity was enhanced through triangulation of sources, cross-comparison of interpretations, and reflexive engagement with both historical texts and current scholarly debates.

This methodological approach facilitated a deep and nuanced understanding of how Dewantara's educational philosophy emerged, evolved, and continues to offer valuable insights into contemporary educational reform. It also allowed the study to critically assess the applicability of his principles to current educational challenges, including globalization, cultural erosion, and the need for inclusive and character-based pedagogy.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy, encapsulated in the framework of *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha*, *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa*, *Tut Wuri Handayani*, offers a comprehensive approach that is highly relevant to transforming modern educational policies. This three-part framework defines the role of educators in fostering a nurturing and effective learning environment (Haryati & Suciptaningsih, 2020; Masitoh et al., 2020; Radcliffe, 1971; Sandra & Juniar, 2021), *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha*, leading by example, serving as role models for students; *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa*, fostering initiative, cultivating a sense of agency and purpose in learners; *Tut Wuri Handayani*, providing supportive guidance, empowering

students to navigate their own paths.

These principles articulate the role of educators in fostering a learning environment that emphasizes leadership, initiative, and supportive guidance, each of which plays a critical role in addressing the current educational issues of equity, inclusivity, and cultural preservation. Dewantara's framework calls for educators to lead by example, foster student agency, and provide supportive mentorship, all essential components in creating an inclusive and equitable educational system.

In the context of this research, Dewantara's philosophy provides a holistic approach to education that aligns with the study's aim of transforming educational practices to enhance inclusivity and cultural awareness while addressing the global challenges of modern education (Chanicka et al., 2018; Khalifa et al., 2019). His emphasis on character development, cultural integration, and active student involvement serves as the foundation for an educational model that not only seeks academic proficiency but also ethical growth and cultural identity (Nisa et al., 2020). This alignment supports the cultivation of well-rounded individuals who are capable of thriving in a globalized world while remaining deeply connected to their local cultural roots.

The modern educational landscape is increasingly confronted with challenges such as promoting inclusivity in diverse classrooms, ensuring equitable access to quality education, and preserving local cultural identity amidst the pressures of globalization (Chand, 2011; Dei, 2015). Dewantara's philosophy offers a transformative approach to these issues, focusing on the integration of local culture and values into the educational system, and ensuring that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, have the opportunity to thrive (Sandra & Juniar, 2021).

The principle of *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha*, or leading by example, is particularly powerful in fostering inclusivity and creating a classroom environment where cultural diversity is celebrated (Marimuthu & Cheong, 2015). Educators who model ethical behavior, cultural awareness, and a commitment to inclusivity inspire students from diverse backgrounds to embrace their cultural identities (Correa & Tulbert, 1991; Moosa et al., 2022; Rude et al., 2005; Thomas, 2005). This helps dismantle barriers, promote mutual respect, and create a sense of belonging within the learning community. Additionally, *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa*, which emphasizes the cultivation of initiative and student agency, ensures that learners are empowered to take active roles in their education (Ala'i, 2019; Siahaan et al., 2020; Syafriani et al., 2022). By encouraging students to become proactive in their learning, educators foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills that will enable them to engage effectively with global challenges, all while staying grounded in their cultural heritage (Shulsky et al., 2017).

Furthermore, *Tut Wuri Handayani*, which focuses on providing supportive guidance, offers a model for educators to mentor students, helping them navigate academic and personal challenges (Arsad et al., 2020; Rambitan, 2021; Sarumaha, 2020). This principle underscores the importance of personalized attention and mentorship, which are key to ensuring that all students, regardless of background, receive the support necessary to reach their full potential (Freeman, 1999; Pane et al., 2017). Through these principles, Dewantara's philosophy provides an educational framework that promotes both academic success and the development of ethical and culturally aware individuals.

In today's interconnected world, the challenge of balancing global competitiveness with the preservation of local culture is particularly pronounced (Capobianco et al., 2018; Slimbach, 2005; Zhang, 2019). Dewantara's educational philosophy offers a solution by emphasizing the integration of local culture into the curriculum, thereby fostering pride and

appreciation for one's heritage. This approach ensures that students remain connected to their cultural roots, even as they engage with the globalized world (Sandra & Juniar, 2021). The importance of this dual focus, on global awareness and cultural preservation, becomes clear in an era where globalization often threatens to overshadow local traditions and values.

By encouraging students to view themselves as both global citizens and caretakers of their cultural heritage, Dewantara's principles provide a roadmap for navigating the complexities of modern identity. His approach empowers students to take on leadership roles that respect and celebrate their cultural identity, while simultaneously equipping them with the skills needed to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

Recontextualizing Dewantara's principles for the modern educational context is essential for addressing the challenges of inclusivity, cultural integration, and character development in today's education systems (Haryati & Suciptaningsih, 2020; Masitoh et al., 2020; Nisa et al., 2020; Sandra & Juniar, 2021). His framework can be applied to reform educational policies and practices, ensuring that they are responsive to the needs of a diverse student population while fostering cultural awareness and global citizenship. Dewantara's principles provide an effective model for integrating local wisdom with global trends, ensuring that students are not only academically proficient but also ethically and culturally competent.

Incorporating Dewantara's philosophy into modern curricula will require a shift in teaching methodologies, emphasizing student-centered approaches that promote active learning and critical thinking (Sandra & Juniar, 2021). '*Ing Madya Mangun Karsa*' calls for the empowerment of students, encouraging them to take responsibility for their learning and actively engage with the material. This can be achieved through more interactive, project-based learning environments that foster both intellectual and personal growth. The principle of '*Tut Wuri Handayani*' offers a model for educators to provide individualized support to students, helping them navigate both the academic challenges and personal obstacles they may encounter.

Moreover, the integration of Dewantara's principles with global educational trends, such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and digital learning, presents both challenges and opportunities. While global trends emphasize technological proficiency and academic rigor, Dewantara's emphasis on cultural awareness, ethical development, and local knowledge ensures that students do not lose sight of their cultural identities. By blending these elements, educators can create learning environments that value both academic excellence and cultural competence.

Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy has been the subject of various case studies and research, providing evidence of its relevance and challenges when applied in modern contexts. One notable study conducted by Sandra & Juniar (2021) highlights the implementation of Dewantara's principles in Sekolah Taman Siswa, a school system founded on his educational ideals. The study found that the integration of cultural values and character education fostered a strong sense of community and cultural identity among students. Teachers in these schools were seen as role models, embodying the principle of *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha*, which in turn inspired students to demonstrate ethical and responsible behavior both in and outside the classroom.

Another study by Rambitan (2021) examined the application of *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa* in rural schools in Java. The research revealed that empowering students to take initiative in their learning had a profound impact on their confidence and critical thinking skills. For example, project-based learning initiatives that incorporated local cultural practices, such as traditional arts and crafts, not only enhanced student engagement but also instilled a sense

of pride in their cultural heritage. However, the study also pointed out logistical and resource-related challenges, such as limited access to learning materials and teacher training programs, which hindered the broader application of these principles.

Further insights come from a study by [Manullang et al. \(2019\)](#), which focused on the principle of *Tut Wuri Handayani* in inclusive education settings. The research highlighted how mentorship and supportive guidance played a crucial role in fostering equity among students with diverse needs. In an inclusive school, teachers trained in Dewantara's philosophy were able to create adaptive learning environments that catered to both gifted students and those with disabilities ([Astuti & Sudrajat, 2020](#)). However, the study also emphasized the resource-intensive nature of this approach, noting that smaller class sizes and specialized training were key to its success, factors that may not be scalable across Indonesia's diverse educational landscape.

On the other hand, challenges in aligning Dewantara's philosophy with contemporary demands are also evident in these studies. For instance, research by [Arsad et al. \(2020\)](#) critiqued the potential conflict between Dewantara's cultural focus and the global push for STEM education. Their findings suggest that while integrating local cultural values enriches the educational experience, it sometimes detracts from the time and resources allocated to core academic subjects that are prioritized in global competitiveness rankings. The study advocates for a balanced approach, where cultural elements are woven into broader academic objectives rather than treated as separate or competing priorities.

Taken together, these studies provide a mixed picture of the application of Dewantara's principles in modern education. They affirm the transformative potential of Dewantara's philosophy, particularly in fostering character development, inclusivity, and cultural identity. At the same time, they underscore the practical challenges of scaling these principles across diverse and resource-constrained contexts. This body of research suggests that while Dewantara's vision remains deeply relevant, its successful implementation in educational policies requires careful adaptation, robust teacher training, and strategic resource allocation to meet the complexities of Indonesia's modern educational landscape.

Building upon Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy, this policy framework is designed to address modern educational challenges while preserving local cultural values and character. Each policy component integrates a holistic approach that balances global demands with local identity, ensuring that education produces individuals who are not only academically competent but also ethically grounded, inclusive, and culturally aware. The following table outlines the strategic elements of the policy framework inspired by Ki Hajar Dewantara's principles.

Table 1. Policy Framework Based on Ki Hajar Dewantara's Educational Philosophy

Policy Component	Principle of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Philosophy	Strategic Implementation
Vision of Policy	Balancing local cultural values with global competence	Integrating character values, local culture, and 21st-century skills into every aspect of education to create individuals who are globally competitive without losing cultural identity.

Policy Component	Principle of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Philosophy	Strategic Implementation
Role of Educators	<i>Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha</i> : "Leaders as role models"	Intensive teacher training in character building, professional ethics, and cultural awareness, including the implementation of inclusivity to strengthen multicultural relationships in the classroom.
Learning Methods	<i>Ing Madya Mangun Karsa</i> : "Building initiative within the community"	Adopting a Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach that integrates local contexts such as art, culture, and the environment to encourage active student participation while maintaining cultural identity.
Support for Students	<i>Tut Wuri Handayani</i> : "Support and guide"	Providing individual mentoring tailored to students' needs, along with inclusive support facilities based on individual requirements, including students with special needs.
Value-Based Curriculum	Holistic, culture-based, and character-driven	Developing a curriculum that blends STEM skills, global literacy, and local values such as cooperation, tolerance, and relevant local wisdom.
Learning Evaluation	Focus on the process and character development of students	Using formative and summative assessments that evaluate character development, critical thinking skills, collaboration, and appreciation for local culture.
Community Engagement	Being part of the educational ecosystem	Involving the community in school activities through cultural project collaborations, community work, environmental education, and arts and culture programs based on the community.
Integration of Technology	Aligned with local values	Developing a digital platform based on local culture to expand access to education while preserving culture, including the digitization of arts and local wisdom.
Balancing Competencies	Global and local	Implementing bilingual education that incorporates global perspectives while not forgetting local language and culture, through international collaborations based on culture.
Education Financing	Inclusive and equitable	Allocating special funds to support students from marginalized groups, improving infrastructure in underdeveloped areas, and reducing educational access gaps.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Ongoing and participatory	Using a participatory evaluation approach involving students, teachers, parents, and local communities to ensure policy effectiveness and alignment with cultural values.

Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy, as evidenced by various case studies and research, provides a strong foundation for the proposed framework. Each component of this framework aligns with Dewantara's principles, ensuring that the educational policies not only address the challenges of modern education but also uphold cultural values and character development. Hanifah et al. (2024) stated that the cultivation of character and life skills in education is important and necessary to shape a generation with strong character, responsibility, and dedication to society and religion.

4. CONCLUSION

Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy provides timeless principles that address the complexities of modern education by balancing cultural values with global competencies. His ideas emphasize character development, inclusivity, and the integration of local culture into education, forming a strong foundation for policy development aimed at addressing contemporary challenges. This framework outlines key components essential for crafting educational policies that cultivate globally-minded students while preserving cultural identity. It advocates for a holistic approach to education that includes empowering educators as role models, implementing student-centered teaching methodologies, and integrating local wisdom into curricula. These elements ensure students are prepared for global competitiveness without losing their cultural roots.

The policy implications are clear, policymakers must adapt Dewantara's principles to contemporary contexts, ensuring inclusivity, equity, and sustainability in education. Strategies such as integrating project-based learning with local culture, providing individualized mentorship, and leveraging technology in culturally relevant ways highlight the transformative potential of his vision. Ultimately, the successful implementation of Dewantara's philosophy requires overcoming resistance to change and equipping educators with the tools to champion his approach. By doing so, educational systems can create inclusive environments that foster ethical, culturally aware, and globally competent individuals, ensuring a harmonious balance between local values and global demands.

Future research should focus on empirical studies that investigate the implementation of Dewantara-inspired policies in contemporary educational systems. These studies could provide valuable insights into the practical application of his educational philosophy in diverse contexts, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities of integrating Dewantara's holistic approach into modern educational landscapes.

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