



THE ACTUALIZATION OF KI HADJAR DEWANTARA'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN FOSTERING GENERATION Z'S CHARACTER IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology offers Generation Z opportunities to learn and develop their potential, but it also presents challenges related to digital ethics, responsibility, self-control, and social behaviour. This study aims to analyse the actualization of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy in fostering Generation Z's character in the digital era. It employs a qualitative approach using a literature review method (library research). Data were obtained from books, journal articles, and scientific publications and analysed through data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification. The findings indicate that Ki Hadjar Dewantara's ideas can be applied through the concepts of kodrat alam and kodrat zaman, the educational leadership trilogy, and the Merdeka Curriculum. Their application includes teachers' role modelling in digital ethics, innovative learning that promotes creativity and collaboration, and strengthening students' independence and responsibility. The novelty of this study lies in integrating these three concepts into a framework for Generation Z's character education in the digital era. This study concludes that Ki Hadjar Dewantara's ideas remain relevant as a foundation for humanistic, contextual, and adaptive character education. However, their implementation still requires empirical testing.

ABSTRAK

Perkembangan teknologi digital membuka peluang bagi Generasi Z untuk belajar dan mengembangkan diri, tetapi juga menimbulkan tantangan dalam etika digital, tanggung jawab, pengendalian diri, dan perilaku sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis aktualisasi filsafat pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara dalam membangun karakter Generasi Z di era digital. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kepustakaan (library research). Data diperoleh dari buku, artikel jurnal, dan publikasi ilmiah, kemudian dianalisis melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pemikiran Ki Hadjar Dewantara dapat diterapkan melalui konsep kodrat alam dan kodrat zaman, trilogi kepemimpinan pendidikan, serta Kurikulum Merdeka. Penerapannya mencakup keteladanan guru dalam etika digital, pembelajaran inovatif yang mendorong kreativitas dan kolaborasi, serta penguatan kemandirian dan tanggung jawab peserta didik. Kebaruan kajian ini terletak pada integrasi ketiga konsep tersebut dalam kerangka pendidikan karakter Generasi Z di era digital. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pemikiran Ki Hadjar Dewantara tetap relevan sebagai landasan pendidikan karakter yang humanis, kontekstual, dan adaptif. Namun, penerapannya masih memerlukan pengujian empiris.

Kata kunci: Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Filsafat Pendidikan, Pendidikan Karakter, Generasi Z

INTRODUCTION

Globalization encourages every country to enhance its competitiveness across various sectors, including education, economics, politics, social affairs, culture, and science and technology. This situation requires countries to respond adaptively to changes in their environments (Rais et al., 2018). In the twenty-first century, the development of digital technology has brought significant changes to society, including the field of education. These changes have also influenced the characteristics of younger generations, particularly Generation Z, which has grown up amid the rapid development of information technology. Born between 1995 and 2010, this generation exhibits diverse characteristics and is familiar with using digital technology in everyday life (Dewi, 2019).

Generation Z is often referred to as digital natives because of its close connection with the internet, social media, and various digital platforms. Digital technology facilitates access to information, expands communication opportunities, and encourages creativity. However, these developments also present challenges to the character formation of younger generations. In digital environments, the authority of knowledge is increasingly influenced by content visibility and popularity rather than solely by scholarly competence (Mustofa & Indana, 2026). Furthermore, technology use without critical thinking skills and self-control may increase the risk of spreading unverified information, weakening communication ethics, and fostering individualistic behavior (Alruthaya & Lokuge, 2021). Several studies have also associated inappropriate technology use with moral and psychological problems among younger generations (Meilinda et al., 2020). These conditions highlight the importance of character education in helping students respond responsibly to social and technological changes (Zaini, 2020).

In the context of Indonesian education, strengthening character has become an important concern because education aims not only to develop intellectual abilities but also to shape students' behavior and moral values. Character-related problems can manifest in various forms, including bullying, violence in school environments, and academic dishonesty. When moral values and proper conduct are not consistently reflected in everyday behavior, these conditions may indicate problems in the character formation process (Sigit, 2025). Warzi and Thoha also emphasize the importance of character formation and strengthening Islamic values in addressing the challenges faced by younger generations (Warzi and Thoha, 2026). Therefore, strengthening educational values must become a shared responsibility of educational institutions, families, and society (Dela, 2020).

These challenges become increasingly complex when the development of digital technology is not accompanied by efforts to strengthen moral values and character. Educational environments play a strategic role in helping students develop the attitudes, behaviors, and social skills needed to respond to global competition (Risma et al., 2023). Character education is essential for fostering empathy, responsibility, and tolerance while preventing bullying in educational settings (Aswat et al., 2022). Accordingly, education should not focus solely on cognitive achievement but should also cultivate individuals with strong character, cultural awareness, and social responsibility. Character education has become increasingly important in addressing the moral and social challenges of the digital era (Triyaswati, 2024). In this regard, character education refers to efforts to instill positive values so that students can distinguish between right and wrong and apply these values in their everyday lives (Ramli et al., 2024).

One educational philosophy relevant to addressing these challenges is that of Ki Hadjar Dewantara. As a prominent figure in the development of Indonesia's national

education system, Ki Hadjar Dewantara viewed education as a process of humanizing individuals through the holistic development of students' potential. Education should not be directed solely toward the mastery of knowledge but should also promote character formation and individual potential development. This perspective is reflected in his educational leadership trilogy: Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, and Tut Wuri Handayani. The trilogy positions educators as role models, motivators, and facilitators who support students' development (Hutagalung & Andriany, 2024). Through this approach, education is intended to guide students by recognizing their potential and freedom to develop, rather than relying solely on control and instruction (Faiz et al., 2026).

The relevance of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational thought can also be linked to the orientation of the Merdeka Curriculum in developing the Pancasila Student Profile. This profile emphasizes faith in and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity. These dimensions are closely related to Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy, which emphasizes student potential development, character formation, and education rooted in national values and culture. Therefore, his educational thought can serve as a conceptual foundation for understanding and developing character education that responds to the needs of Generation Z (Mega, 2024).

Previous studies have examined the relevance of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational thought to contemporary education. His concept of character education has been regarded as a foundation for addressing the negative effects of globalization on Generation Z (Dari & Hudaidah, 2021). In the context of the digital era, his educational philosophy has also been examined as a humanistic approach to strengthening character education and shaping students' moral development (Triyaswati, 2024). Furthermore, the internalization of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy has been associated with the development of the Pancasila Student Profile (Lila, 2024). The relevance of his thought is also evident in the application of his educational trilogy to foster students' character, including responsibility, creativity, independence, and noble character (Herdeta et al., 2024).

Although previous studies have established the relevance of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational thought to character education, further research is needed to examine more specifically how his ideas can be actualized in response to the characteristics of Generation Z in the digital era. The central issue is not merely whether Ki Hadjar Dewantara's thought remains relevant, but also how its philosophical values can be understood and applied to address the challenges of character formation among younger generations in environments shaped by digital technology. This focus is important to ensure that his educational philosophy does not remain merely a set of normative ideas but can also serve as a foundation for formulating character education approaches that respond to social change and technological development.

Addressing this research gap, the present study focuses on the actualization of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy in fostering Generation Z's character in the digital era. It aims to analyze the key values in his educational thought and explain their relevance to Generation Z's character formation. The central argument is that Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy remains relevant as a foundation for character education because it emphasizes humanistic values, exemplary conduct, potential development, and student independence. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute conceptually to the development of character education that fosters a younger generation that is morally grounded, critical, creative, and responsible in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the literature review method (library research). This method was selected to examine and understand the actualization of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy in fostering Generation Z's character through an analysis of relevant scholarly sources. Qualitative research enables researchers to understand a phenomenon based on data that are systematically collected and analyzed (Marisa Aulia & Praise, 2023).

Data were collected through a literature review involving books, journal articles, and scholarly publications relevant to the research focus. Library research is used to examine concepts, theories, values, culture, and various ideas related to the research problem (Sugiyono, 2018). The literature collection process involved identifying, reviewing, evaluating, and summarizing sources to obtain information relevant to the research objectives (Mulia & Kurniati, 2023). The data sources consisted of national and international publications addressing Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy, character education, the characteristics of Generation Z, and educational challenges in the digital era. The collected literature was then selected based on its relevance to the research focus to ensure that the analysis was grounded in sources appropriate to the research problem (Pitaloka, 2021).

Data were analyzed qualitatively through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing on, simplifying, and summarizing information from the collected literature. This stage aimed to retain information relevant to the research focus while excluding information that was not directly related to the study's objectives (Sugiyono, 2018). The data were then presented descriptively and systematically according to themes related to the actualization of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy in fostering Generation Z's character. This presentation aimed to identify relationships among concepts and examine the relevance of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational thought in the context of digital-era education. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions by formulating findings based on patterns, relationships among themes, and meanings identified in the literature, followed by checking their consistency with the sources used. Through these stages, this study is expected to provide a systematic understanding of the contribution of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy to the development of Generation Z's character in the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Synthesis of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Educational Philosophy in Generation Z Character Formation

The literature review indicates that Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy can serve as a conceptual foundation for understanding Generation Z character formation in the digital era. The synthesis identifies three main aspects: aligning education with kodrat alam and kodrat zaman, the role of educators through the educational leadership trilogy, and the relevance of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's thought to the development of student-centered education. These three aspects indicate that character education needs to integrate the social and cultural environment, technological developments, and educators' guidance in developing students' potential.

First, the concepts of kodrat alam and kodrat zaman emphasize that education should consider students' living environments while responding to developments in science and

technology. Social and cultural environments provide a context for character development, while changing times require students to develop the ability to navigate technological advancements critically and responsibly (Dari & Hudaidah, 2021; Faiz et al., 2026). Second, the educational leadership trilogy, comprising Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, and Tut Wuri Handayani, represents three orientations of the educator's role: serving as a role model, fostering students' initiative, and supporting their independence. These three principles position educators not merely as providers of knowledge but also as guides who support the development of students' attitudes and behavior (Sari et al., 2023; Ardiantoro et al., 2025).

Third, Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational thought is relevant to an educational approach that provides students with opportunities to develop their potential, creativity, and independence. This relevance can be linked to the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly its emphasis on adapting learning to students' needs, strengthening character, and involving the educational environment. The concept of the *Tripusat Pendidikan* (Three Centers of Education) also highlights the importance of relationships among families, schools, and communities in supporting students' development (Faiz et al., 2019; Suryana & Muhtar, 2022). In addition, project-based learning can serve as a means of connecting knowledge with real life experiences and character development (Safitri et al., 2022).

Overall, the synthesis indicates that Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational thought encompasses a philosophical foundation, educational leadership principles, and a learning orientation that can be connected to Generation Z character formation. This synthesis provides a basis for discussing how each principle can be actualized through teacher role modeling, innovative learning, the strengthening of student independence, and the integration of character values into the educational environment.

Discussion

Actualizing Kodrat Alam and Kodrat Zaman to Foster Generation Z's Character in the Digital Era

Generation Z grows up in an environment closely connected to the internet, social media, and digital technology. This environment facilitates access to information and broadens knowledge, but it also presents challenges to character formation, including communication ethics, social awareness, and the tendency to accept information without adequate verification. Therefore, education should not focus solely on academic achievement but should also foster students' character development.

The actualization of *kodrat alam* can be achieved through learning activities directly connected to students' real-life experiences, such as community service, environmental awareness campaigns, and local cultural preservation projects. These activities can help develop responsibility, social awareness, cooperation, and appreciation for the local environment and culture. Thus, character education is not conveyed solely through theoretical concepts but is also developed through contextual learning experiences (Mudana, 2019).

Meanwhile, *kodrat zaman* can be actualized by using digital technology as a means of learning and character development. Students can create educational content for social media, organize digital campaigns on environmental issues, or develop technology-based entrepreneurial projects. These activities provide opportunities for students to develop creativity, communication skills, collaboration, and responsibility in using technology. The use of technology in education should be directed not only toward improving digital skills

but also toward strengthening humanistic values and appreciation for culture (Gupitasari et al., 2025). Kodrat alam and kodrat zaman are complementary dimensions. Kodrat alam provides a foundation for character development through students' social and cultural environments, while kodrat zaman enables education to respond to technological developments and changing societal needs. Both can be integrated through contextual learning, responsible use of technology, and the strengthening of humanistic values.

Actualizing the Principle of Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha in Character Formation

The principle of Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha positions teachers as role models who demonstrate values through their actions. In fostering Generation Z's character, role modelling requires consistency between the values teachers teach and the behaviour they demonstrate. Teachers can serve as examples of integrity, discipline, responsibility, self control, and respect for others.

In the context of education in the digital era, this principle also involves setting an example in the use of technology. Teachers can demonstrate responsible digital behaviour by verifying information before sharing it, using polite language in digital communication, respecting differing opinions, and maintaining ethical conduct on social media. Such role modelling can be reinforced through habitual practices and real-life experiences that help students understand how moral values can be applied in everyday life (Hidayati & A'yun, 2024).

The principle of Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha can also be actualized by fostering a school culture that supports character development. Through classroom activities and daily interactions, teachers can encourage discipline, responsibility, social awareness, respect for differences, and the wise use of technology. Role modelling should not be understood as requiring students to imitate teachers passively. Rather, it should provide examples while allowing students to understand the moral reasoning behind particular actions.

This principle is relevant to the challenges of fostering Generation Z's character, given their intensive interaction with digital environments. Developing responsibility, self-control, integrity, and digital ethics requires a combination of conceptual explanations, habituation, and consistent role modelling (Ardiantoro et al., 2025). Teachers can invite students to discuss issues such as the spread of unverified information, cyberbullying, and the use of demeaning language toward others. Thus, the principle of Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha can serve as a foundation for character formation through consistent role modelling in both school life and digital spaces.

Actualizing the Principle of Ing Madya Mangun Karsa through Innovative Learning

The principle of Ing Madya Mangun Karsa emphasizes the role of educators in fostering students' motivation, enthusiasm, and initiative. In practice, teachers act as facilitators who encourage students to think independently, develop creativity, and participate actively in the learning process. This principle is relevant to Generation Z because learning should provide students with opportunities to explore ideas, collaborate, and solve problems.

This principle can be actualized through project-based learning, problem-based learning, and the use of digital technology. Through project-based learning, students can work in groups to produce projects related to social issues, environmental concerns, or the preservation of local culture. Meanwhile, problem-based learning allows students to identify problems, analyze information, consider alternative solutions, and present their ideas. Interactive, collaborative, and experiential learning approaches can support the development of creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and responsibility (Faiz &

Kurniawaty, 2022).

The use of digital technology can further expand the application of Ing Madya Mangun Karsa. Teachers can encourage students to create educational videos, podcasts, infographics, or social media campaigns addressing educational, environmental, social, and cultural issues. These activities not only provide opportunities for students to produce creative work but also train them to select reliable information, communicate messages responsibly, and consider the potential impact of their content on others. Nevertheless, innovative learning involves more than simply using digital devices or platforms. Teachers need to ensure that learning activities have clear objectives, provide equal opportunities for participation, and encourage students to reflect on both their learning processes and outcomes. Thus, the principle of Ing Madya Mangun Karsa can be actualized through learning that integrates active participation, collaboration, creativity, and the responsible use of technology.

Actualizing the Principle of Tut Wuri Handayani to Strengthen Independence

Tut Wuri Handayani means providing encouragement from behind. This principle emphasizes the role of teachers in offering guidance and support to help students develop independence. Teachers do not always serve as the centre of learning but instead provide students with opportunities to explore knowledge, make decisions, and take responsibility for their learning processes. This principle is relevant to Generation Z's education in the digital era because it can support the development of independent, creative, and adaptive character traits (Faiz et al., 2022).

The principle of Tut Wuri Handayani can be actualized through project-based learning, independent learning, and the use of digital technology. In practice, teachers act as facilitators who provide guidance and assistance without taking over students' learning processes. This approach can help students develop time-management skills, make independent decisions, and take responsibility for their assignments (Sugiarta et al., 2019).

Generation Z's independence can also be strengthened through projects that encourage students to seek information independently, formulate solutions to problems, and present their work using digital media. These activities can foster self confidence, discipline, responsibility, and critical thinking skills. In the digital context, independence does not mean that students learn without guidance. Rather, it refers to their ability to use learning resources appropriately and take responsibility for both the process and outcomes of their learning.

Relevance of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Educational Philosophy to the Merdeka Curriculum

Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy is relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in positioning students as the primary subjects of learning. Education should not focus solely on mastering subject matter but also on developing students' potential, fostering character, and equipping them with the ability to live independently. This relevance is reflected in the principle of liberating education, which provides students with opportunities to learn according to their talents, interests, and stages of development. The Merdeka Curriculum allows teachers to adapt the learning process to students' needs.

The concept of *Tripusat Pendidikan* positions the family, school, and community as complementary environments in the educational process. Character formation cannot be entrusted entirely to schools because students also acquire values, habits, and behavioural patterns through interactions within their families and communities. In the digital era, open communication, parental guidance, and role modelling can help students develop responsibility and critical attitudes toward technology use (Suryana & Muhtar, 2022).

The relevance of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy can also be linked to the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)*, or the Project for Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile. This initiative provides students with opportunities to explore real world issues, collaborate, develop creativity, and formulate solutions. This process aligns with the view that education should promote holistic human development encompassing intellectual, moral, and social dimensions (Safitri et al., 2022).

For Generation Z, the use of technology in learning needs to be accompanied by character development. Students should not only be able to access information but also evaluate, process, and use it responsibly. Teachers can facilitate this process by providing opportunities for exploration, guiding students in problem-solving, and instilling ethical values in learning activities. Support from families and communities is also necessary to ensure that the values fostered at school are consistently practised in everyday life. Thus, the relevance of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy to the Merdeka Curriculum lies in its commitment to developing students' potential and fostering their character holistically. This commitment can be realised through student-centred learning, collaboration among families, schools, and communities, and project-based activities that connect knowledge with real-life experiences. Implementing these values is expected to support the development of a Generation Z that is independent, critical, creative, and responsible in responding to the challenges of the digital era.

CONCLUSION

The development of digital technology has brought changes to Generation Z's lives, including their learning processes and character formation. Easy access to information and communication provides opportunities to develop students' potential but also presents challenges related to digital ethics, responsibility, self-control, and social behaviour. In this context, Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy remains relevant as a conceptual foundation for developing character education that focuses not only on academic achievement but also on personality development and students' social responsibility.

The findings indicate that Ki Hadjar Dewantara's ideas can be actualized through the development of *kodrat alam* and *kodrat zaman*, the application of Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, and Tut Wuri Handayani, and the reinforcement of values aligned with the orientation of the Merdeka Curriculum. *Kodrat alam* and *kodrat zaman* emphasise the importance of integrating students' social and cultural environments with technological developments. Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha positions teachers as role models for behaviour and digital ethics, while Ing Madya Mangun Karsa emphasises the role of teachers in fostering students' motivation, creativity, and active participation through innovative learning. Meanwhile, Tut Wuri Handayani highlights the importance of providing students with opportunities and support to develop independence and responsibility. Its relevance to the Merdeka Curriculum is reflected in student-centred learning, the development of students' potential according to their learning needs, and the involvement of families and communities in character formation. Overall, Ki Hadjar Dewantara's ideas can serve as a foundation for developing character education that is relevant to Generation Z's lives in the digital era.

This study has limitations because it employs a literature review method and relies on the literature examined. Therefore, the findings are conceptual and have not been supported by empirical data collected through observations, interviews, or direct testing in educational settings. The study also does not compare the application of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's ideas

across different educational levels, school characteristics, and social contexts. Accordingly, the discussion of how these principles can be applied should be understood as the result of conceptual analysis rather than empirical evidence of their effectiveness in fostering Generation Z's character.

In light of these limitations, future research is recommended to examine the application of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's ideas through field studies in schools with diverse characteristics. Empirical investigations could focus on teachers' and students' experiences in implementing role modelling, collaborative learning, independent learning, and digital ethics. Further research should also examine family and community involvement and identify the factors that support or hinder the implementation of character education in the digital era. For educators and school administrators, Ki Hadjar Dewantara's ideas can serve as a foundation for designing learning activities that integrate technological competence, role modelling, real-life experiences, and moral reflection. These efforts need to be sustained to ensure that the use of digital technology goes hand in hand with the development of students' character, independence, creativity, critical thinking, and social responsibility.

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