

# PHILOSOPHY OF KI HAJAR DEWANTARA'S CONCEPTS AND INDEPENDENT LEARNING CURRICULUM FOR INDONESIAN EDUCATION CHARACTER BUILDING

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## Abstrak

*Pendidikan adalah proses pembelajaran untuk mengembangkan siswa tanpa paksaan, namun siswa dapat mengembangkan diri mereka sendiri apabila mereka merasa bebas baik secara fisik dan psikis. Kurikulum Merdeka adalah kebijakan pendidikan nasional yang menekankan pembelajaran berpusat pada siswa dan pembentukan karakter. Namun, kurikulum ini sering dipahami hanya sebagai respons terhadap tuntutan zaman, tanpa diteliti secara mendalam dari perspektif landasan filosofis pendidikan nasional. Di sisi lain, pemikiran Ki Hajar Dewantara menempatkan pendidikan karakter, kebebasan belajar yang bertanggung jawab, dan pendidikan tanpa paksaan sebagai inti dari proses pendidikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis relevansi pemikiran pendidikan Ki Hajar Dewantara terhadap Kurikulum Merdeka dalam kerangka pendidikan karakter di perguruan tinggi. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode tinjauan literatur dengan pendekatan konseptual-filosofis, dengan sumber primer berupa karya-karya Ki Hajar Dewantara dan dokumen resmi Kurikulum Merdeka, serta sumber sekunder dari literatur ilmiah yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa prinsip-prinsip pendidikan Ki Hajar Dewantara sangat selaras dengan arah dan semangat Kurikulum Merdeka. Kurikulum Merdeka dapat dipahami sebagai implementasi nilai-nilai pendidikan Ki Hajar Dewantara dalam kebijakan pendidikan kontemporer.*

**Kata Kunci:** *pendidikan karakter, konsep pendidikan, Ki Hajar Dewantara, merdeka belajar*

## **Abstract**

*Education is a learning process to develop students without force, but students can develop themselves if they feel free physically and mentally. The Independent Curriculum is a national education policy that emphasizes student-centered learning and character building. However, this curriculum is often understood merely as a response to the demands of the times, without being studied in depth from the perspective of the philosophical foundations of national education. On the other hand, Ki Hajar Dewantara's thinking places character education, responsible freedom of learning, and education without coercion at the core of the educational process. This study aims to analyze the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thinking to the Independent Curriculum in the framework of character education in higher education. This study used a literature review method with a conceptual-philosophical approach, with primary sources in the form of Ki Hajar Dewantara's works and official documents of the Independent Curriculum, as well as secondary sources from relevant scientific literature. The results of the study showed that Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational principles are strongly aligned with the direction and spirit of the Independent Curriculum. The Independent Curriculum can be understood as the actualization of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational values in contemporary educational policy.*

**Keywords:** *character building, education concepts, Ki Hajar Dewantara, independent learning.*

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

The curriculum is considered a guide in teaching and learning activities. The curriculum certainly has a particular perspective on assessing an educational activity (Iqbal et al., 2022). Of course, each curriculum is compiled based on the perspective of philosophy to determine the right strategies and steps to achieve educational goals. The Law Number 20 of 2003 explains that education is a process that aims to develop the skills and potential of each individual. In this case, the law uses the concept of progressivism, which is the view of philosophy that aims for new changes in a person after the education process (Triyatno et al., 2022).

Educational challenges for the next generation needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in terms of knowledge, skills, and character should be formed from now on. For example, the must-have skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century are commonly known as the 4Cs, namely critical thinking, communication, creativity, and collaboration (Bialik et al., 2015). However, in reality, Indonesia is still ranked 74th out of 79 countries included in the 2019 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in the fields of numeracy and literacy (Iqbal et al., 2022).

In Law Number 20 of 2003, Education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have the spiritual strength of diversity, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills needed by themselves, society, nation, and State. The purpose of education, both formal and informal, is character building and the development of skills, talents, and social personality (Mubarok et al., 2021). To improve the quality of education in Indonesia, there is certainly a need for the preparation, improvement, or change of the curriculum that adapts to civilization and the needs of the times.

The Independent Curriculum is a national education policy that reaffirms that education is not only oriented towards academic achievement, but also towards shaping the character of students (Mubarok et al., 2021). The curriculum, as the core of education, serves as a guideline for the objectives, content, and learning strategies that reflect a particular philosophical view of humanity, knowledge, and the educational process (Ansya, 2017; Ankesa, 2021). For this reason, understanding the philosophical foundations of the curriculum is an important aspect so that education policy does not stop at the administrative level but has a clear conceptual direction in its formulation and plan for implementation.

A variety of studies have examined the Independent Curriculum from various educational philosophy perspectives, such as progressivism, constructivism, and humanism (Faiz & Kurniawaty, 2020; Mustaghfiroh, 2020; Yusuf & Arfiansyah, 2021). These studies generally position the Independent Curriculum as a response to the demands of the 21st century, technological developments, and the need for learner-centered learning that no longer places teachers at the center of the learning process. On the other hand, the thoughts of Ki Hajar Dewantara, the Father of Indonesian Education, have also been widely studied, particularly in relation to the concepts of character education, freedom of learning, and education without coercion, but with guidance from teachers as guides and facilitators of the learning process (Dewantara, 1977; Winarso, 2016; Astriani & Samsuri, 2018).

Despite this, most of these studies remain separate. The Independent Curriculum is more often understood as a contemporary

educational policy, while Ki Hajar Dewantara's ideas are positioned as historical heritage. This situation indicates a research gap, namely the limited number of studies that explicitly and systematically analyze the continuity and relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's ideas as the philosophical basis of the Independent Curriculum, particularly in the context of character education in higher education.

Conceptually, Ki Hajar Dewantara's idea of education as a process of guiding all the natural strengths within students to develop independently and responsibly is in line with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum, which places students as the subjects of learning (Dewantara, 1977; Masitoh et al., 2020). The principles of education without coercion, responsible freedom, and an emphasis on character building are the main points of convergence between Ki Hajar Dewantara's thinking and the direction of the Independent Curriculum policy.

The importance of this study is even stronger in the context of higher education. Universities are not only required to produce graduates who are academically and professionally competent, but also individuals who have character, independence, and social responsibility because the 21st century requires responsible individuals who are ready for change (Bialik et al., 2015). Various research findings show that the actualization of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational values in higher education institutions has produced mixed results. Research by Bakhtiar et al. (2019) showed that these values have not been fully internalized in learning practices, while research by Masitoh et al. (2020) and Masitoh & Wagino (2023) indicated the successful application of Ki Hajar Dewantara's values in strengthening the character of the academic community. These differing findings indicate the need for a more in-depth conceptual study as a basis for understanding and interpreting the curriculum.

Based on this context, this study aims to analyze the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy to the Independent Curriculum within the framework of character education in higher education. Specifically, the objectives of this study are: (1) to analyze the concept of character education according to Ki Hajar Dewantara; (2) to examine the alignment of this concept with the principles and direction of the Independent Curriculum; and (3) to explain the position of Ki Hajar

Dewantara's thinking as the philosophical basis of the Independent Curriculum in the context of character education in higher education. Thus, this research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution in strengthening the meaning of the Independent Curriculum rooted in national educational philosophy and clarifying the position of Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts in contemporary educational policy.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study used a qualitative approach with a conceptual-philosophical library research method. This method was chosen because the purpose of the study was not to examine the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the field, but rather to analyze the ideas and relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thinking to the Independent Curriculum within the framework of character education in higher education.

The objects of this study are Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy and the Independent Curriculum. The primary data sources are Ki Hajar Dewantara's works, particularly of Ki Hajar Dewantara: Pendidikan (1977), as well as official documents on the Independent Curriculum published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. Secondary data sources include books and scientific articles relevant to educational philosophy, character education, and the Independent Curriculum, which serve to support and reinforce the analysis.

Data collection techniques were carried out through searching, sorting, and grouping literature according to the research focus. The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive-analytical analysis, by interpreting key concepts in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thinking and comparing them with the principles and direction of the Independent Curriculum. The results of the analysis were then systematically compiled to explain the harmony and position of Ki Hajar Dewantara's thinking as the philosophical foundation of the Independent Curriculum in character education in higher education.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Ki Hajar Dewantara's Concept of Character Education**

Ki Hajar Dewantara viewed education as a process of guiding all the natural powers within humans so that they can develop optimally and meaningfully for both personal and social life (Dewantara, 1977). Education, in this perspective, is not interpreted as a process of imposing the will of the educator on the students, but rather as an effort to guide the growth of students in accordance with their natural nature and the nature of their time. Therefore, character building is at the core of the educational process, not merely a complement to academic achievement.

Ki Hajar Dewantara's concept of character education is reflected in his emphasis on students' morals, independence, and moral responsibility. According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, good education must be able to shape individuals who are independent in their thoughts and actions, yet still possess ethical and social awareness and are not easily influenced by other people and situations (Winarso, 2016; Astriani & Samsuri, 2018). Freedom in education is not interpreted as unlimited freedom, but rather freedom guided by the values and objectives of education itself, so that there are still rules that apply because the freedom referred to is a free spirit, meaning independence, so that one understands what should and should not be done as a human being who understands oneself.

One of Ki Hajar Dewantara's important contributions to character education is the Tri N concept, namely *niteni*, *nirokke*, and *nambahi*. *Niteni* refers to the process of observing and understanding values, *nirokke* to the process of emulating, and *nambahi* to the process of developing creatively according to context (Dewantara, 1977; Andayani et al., 2021). This concept emphasizes that character building and independent learning must go through systematic and continuous pedagogical stages.

### **The Relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Thoughts to the Independent Curriculum**

The results of the study showed that the main principles of the Independent Curriculum are strongly aligned with Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thoughts. The concepts of learner-centered learning, responsible freedom of learning (not just freedom to learn without direction or

purpose), and the role of educators as facilitators are in line with Ki Hajar Dewantara's ideas about education without coercion and educators as supervisors or guiders (Dewantara, 1977; Masitoh et al., 2020).

The Independent Curriculum emphasizes the importance of independent learning and character building, which is conceptually in line with Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational goal of shaping independent individuals with character. In the context of higher education, this harmony is important because students are positioned as adults who need to be guided to develop their intellectual potential as well as their character and social responsibility (Bialik et al., 2015). Independence is not the same as freedom, but it is the authority to manage one's life based on the rules that apply to free human beings.

The implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's principles in higher education has yielded a variety of results, according to various research. Bakhtiar et al. (2019) showed that these values have not been fully internalized in learning practices, while Masitoh et al. (2020) and Masitoh & Wagino (2023) showed the successful application of these values in strengthening the character of the academic community. The contrasting findings highlight how crucial it is to have a conceptual grasp of Ki Hajar Dewantara's ideas before talking about implementation-related issues.

Therefore, the Independent Curriculum can be understood as a form of actualization of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational values in the context of contemporary education policy. This perspective supports the Independent Curriculum's status as both a policy innovation and an extension of national education thought based on Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy in the modern era.

### **The Independent Curriculum from a Philosophy of Education Perspective**

The Independent Curriculum was developed in response to the need for more adaptive, contextual, and character-oriented learning. This curriculum places students as the main subjects of learning, providing flexibility in choosing learning strategies, methods, and experiences according to individual needs and potential (Mubarok et al., 2021). The

emphasis on student-centered learning indicates a paradigm shift from a uniform curriculum to a more humanistic and participatory curriculum.

In educational philosophy studies, the Independent Curriculum is widely understood within the framework of progressivism and constructivism. According to the progressivist perspective, the curriculum is a set of educational activities intended to assist pupils in developing critical, innovative, and adaptable thinking abilities in response to societal shifts and advancements like the difficulties of the 21st century (Ankesa, 2021; Triyatno et al., 2022). The curriculum is no longer understood as a collection of material that must be transmitted, but rather as a vehicle for developing thinking and problem-solving skills that are relevant to real life, especially in the globalization era.

Progressivism views the curriculum as an educational experience that will go through the process of any learning experience, following the objectives according to the principles of education, to help the growth and development of students by focusing more attention on creativity, activity, and learning of these students (Ankesa, 2021). Progressivism centers on students by giving them the freedom to learn and develop several aspects of individual skills and abilities to face the challenges of the times (Faiz & Kurniawaty, 2020; Fitria, 2022; Shodik, 2021; Sopacua & Fadli, 2022). The concept of giving students freedom in learning is certainly the same as the concept of an independent curriculum. Progressivism views that every student can survive in facing problems by honing their skills and developing their personality based on their environment (Fitria, 2022). However, the concept of freedom in learning was criticized by Paulo Freire because there is no completely free education. After all, learning is a process of realizing the potential and abilities that have not been optimally developed because freedom can only be given to people who are aware of the reality of themselves and the surrounding world (Prahani et al., 2020).

In contrast, constructivism emphasizes that the learning process is an active process of learners in constructing knowledge through interaction with the learning environment, including physical, social, and cultural environments (Yusuf & Arfiansyah, 2021). Within this framework, the role of educators shifts from being the main source of knowledge to being facilitators who accompany the process of meaning construction by learners.



This interpretation is in line with the principle of learning flexibility in the Independent Curriculum, which provides space for learning differentiation according to learner characteristics (Faiz & Kurniawaty, 2020; Mustaghfiroh, 2020).

Furthermore, the dominance of progressivism and constructivism in the interpretation of the Independent Curriculum has the potential to reduce the meaning of learning freedom if it is not accompanied by a clear value foundation. Learning freedom risks being understood pragmatically as the freedom to choose learning activities alone, without considering the normative goals of education and the character building of students. This condition highlights the importance of the essentialist perspective, which emphasizes that education must remain oriented towards fundamental values and national educational goals (Ankesa, 2021).

However, essentialism also provides another view of curriculum preparation. Of course, curriculum preparation, especially in terms of the material to be studied, is important to be determined following the objectives of Indonesian education from basic, secondary, to higher education. Even though this independent curriculum liberates students in thinking and solving problems, of course, it must be balanced with appropriate material to hone students' skills and abilities so that they can develop properly. Essentialism assumes applying various curriculum patterns, such as idealism, realism, and so on, by centering on subjects because it cannot be denied that subjects will be influential in developing mindsets (Ankesa, 2021). The subjects presented in the curriculum according to essentialism need to be managed in order of complexity, abstraction, and difficulty so that they can provide benefits for students in real life (Richardo & Cahdriyana, 2021). In this independent curriculum, learning focuses on essential material and developing learner competencies at their phase and level (Triyatno et al., 2022).

The Independent Curriculum does not negate the dimension of essentialism. This can be seen from the learning outcomes, curriculum structure, and basic values that must be achieved by students as part of the national education goals (Triyatno et al., 2022). Thus, learning freedom in the Independent Curriculum exists in a productive tension between learning flexibility and the necessity to maintain educational values and direction.

In this context, the interpretation of the Independent Curriculum needs to be placed within the philosophical framework of Indonesian education. Ki Hajar Dewantara's thinking offers an alternative perspective that is not only in line with the principle of student-centered learning but also provides ethical and value boundaries to learning freedom. The concept of education as a guiding process, responsible freedom, and an emphasis on character building make Ki Hajar Dewantara's thinking relevant as the philosophical foundation of the Independent Curriculum. By reading the Independent Curriculum through this perspective, curriculum policy is not only understood as an adoption of Western philosophical discourse, but as a continuation of national educational thinking rooted in the social and cultural context of Indonesia.

#### **D. CONCLUSIONS**

This study concluded that Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy has strong and significant relevance to the direction and principles of the Independent Curriculum, particularly in the context of character education in higher education. The concept of education as a process of guiding the nature of students, responsible freedom of learning, and education without coercion are the main values that form the meeting point between Ki Hajar Dewantara's thinking and the spirit of the Independent Curriculum.

The findings of the conceptual-philosophical study showed that the Independent Curriculum can be understood not merely as a contemporary educational policy, but as the actualization of educational values that have long been formulated in national educational thought. By placing Ki Hajar Dewantara's thinking as its philosophical foundation, the Independent Curriculum gains a stronger conceptual footing in interpreting freedom of learning as a process of character development, independence, and responsibility for students.

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