



## The Relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Thoughts in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. As a national education figure, Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasized education that is liberating, culture-based, and student-centered. These principles serve as an essential foundation for the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to provide flexibility in learning while fostering students' character development and independence. One key identification in this study is the lack of explicit research connecting Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. While there have been numerous studies on both subjects separately, research that directly explores the relationship between Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational concepts and the Merdeka Curriculum remains limited. Additionally, challenges persist in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in terms of educators' readiness and the adaptation of learning methods that emphasize freedom of thought. This study employs a qualitative approach with a literature review method. Data were collected through an analysis of various primary and secondary sources, including Ki Hajar Dewantara's writings, government policies related to the Merdeka Curriculum, and previous research. The analysis was conducted using a descriptive-critical approach to identify the alignment between Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy and the Merdeka Curriculum concept. The findings of this study indicate that the principles of *ing ngarso sung tulodo, ing madyo manguk karso, tut wuri handayani*, and Ki Hajar Dewantara's concept of independent learning are highly relevant to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The results of this research can serve as a guideline for educators and policymakers in developing a more adaptive, contextual, and character-based education system in line with national education values.*

**Keywords:** *Thought, Ki Hajar Dewantara, Merdeka Curriculum*



## INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main pillars of a nation's development. In Indonesia, the education system has undergone various changes to adapt to the demands of the times and societal needs (Rahmat, 2023). One of the ongoing educational reforms is the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to provide flexibility in the learning process, accommodate students' needs, and emphasize character development and 21<sup>st</sup>-century competencies. This curriculum emerged in response to the challenges of globalization, technological advancements, and the need for a more inclusive and contextualized education system. However, in its implementation, the Merdeka Curriculum still faces various obstacles, including policy issues, teacher preparedness, and acceptance by students and the broader community.

In the context of Indonesia's educational history, Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts have played a highly significant role. As the Father of National Education, he introduced an educational concept that promotes freedom, emphasizes cultural aspects, and is student-centered. His renowned educational philosophy—*ing ngarso sung tulodo, ing madyo mangun karso, tut wuri handayani*—is highly relevant in building a humanistic education system focused on character development. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum to ensure that this curriculum reform remains rooted in national educational values.

Various studies have been conducted regarding the Merdeka Curriculum and the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) concept. For example, research by Wulandari et al. (2022) discusses the implementation of project-based learning in the Merdeka Curriculum, highlighting teachers' role in adapting to a more flexible and differentiated approach. Additionally, Setiawan (2021) identifies challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in schools with limited resources. Although numerous studies have examined the Merdeka Curriculum from the perspectives of policy implementation and field challenges, few explicitly explore the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy to the curriculum's concept and implementation.

One aspect that remains underexplored is how Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational values can be integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum to enhance learning effectiveness. Suryadi (2020) found that many educators lack a deep understanding of Ki Hajar Dewantara's culture-based education concept and how to apply it in a modern curriculum. This indicates a gap between



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national educational philosophy and current classroom practices in Indonesia.

This study aims to fill that gap by further exploring the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. By systematically examining Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational values—particularly in the aspects of learning independence, the role of educators, and culture-based approaches—this research seeks to provide insights for educators and policymakers in effectively implementing the Merdeka Curriculum within the context of Indonesian education.

Additionally, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for developing more sustainable education policies. Integrating Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational concepts into the Merdeka Curriculum can not only improve learning effectiveness but also ensure that Indonesia's education system remains rooted in national identity and local cultural values. Thus, this study is crucial for supporting a more inclusive, flexible, and character-oriented educational transformation.

The urgency of this research lies in the need for an education system that is both adaptive and firmly grounded in national educational values. In the current era of globalization and digitalization, education must address emerging challenges such as technological advancements, changing work patterns, and the demand for 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. The Merdeka Curriculum is introduced as a solution to provide learning flexibility and accommodate students' needs. However, its implementation still encounters several challenges.

One of the primary obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is teachers' lack of understanding regarding flexible and independent learning-based teaching methods. Rahmawati (2021) found that many teachers remain accustomed to conventional teaching approaches and struggle to adapt to more dynamic, project-based learning models. Additionally, there is a gap between educational policies and classroom practices, as many schools face difficulties in adopting the Merdeka Curriculum due to limited resources and infrastructure.

By examining the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts in the Merdeka Curriculum, this study aims to provide solutions to these challenges. Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational concepts—emphasizing freedom in learning, the teacher's role as a mentor, and a culture-based approach—can serve as guidelines for developing a more effective Merdeka Curriculum implementation strategy. Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to



contribute significantly to educational policy development, teacher capacity-building, and the optimization of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method using a literature review approach to analyze and synthesize previous research and relevant literature on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy. This approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth exploration of existing theories and concepts, as well as the identification of gaps in the literature concerning the integration of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational values into Indonesia's modern education system, particularly the Merdeka Curriculum. The literature review also considers previous studies discussing the implementation challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum and research on Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy in the context of 21st-century education. The study focuses on critically analyzing existing literature to develop a deeper understanding of how Ki Hajar Dewantara's values can be integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum.

The sources used in this study consist of Books and scholarly works on Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy. This research reviews Ki Hajar Dewantara's works and previous analyses of his educational philosophy, particularly those related to culture-based education, independent learning, and humanism. Articles and journals on the Merdeka Curriculum: Literature discussing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at various educational levels is analyzed, including studies on teachers' challenges and policy strategies to optimize its implementation. Research on cultural integration in education: Studies examining the relationship between education and culture, as well as how Ki Hajar Dewantara's cultural education concepts can be adapted in today's curriculum, are essential sources for this research. Educational policy documents: Government documents related to Indonesia's education policies, particularly those concerning the Merdeka Curriculum, are analyzed to determine how these policies should be implemented and how Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy can serve as a foundation for these policies.

Relevant literature is selected based on the following criteria: Articles and books discussing Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy, particularly on culture-based education



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and independent learning; Research on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum relevant to Indonesia's educational context and the challenges faced; Studies linking educational theories with classroom practices.

The selected literature is evaluated for its quality and relevance to the research topic. The researcher conducts a critical analysis of the existing literature, identifying gaps or differing viewpoints, and determining its contribution to a deeper understanding of the subject. The data collected from relevant literature are synthesized to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This synthesis integrates findings from various sources to provide a holistic perspective on the research topic.

**Data Analysis** The literature review employs thematic analysis techniques with the following steps: **Identifying Main Themes:** Key themes emerging from the reviewed literature are identified, including independent learning, the teacher's role as a facilitator, culture-based education, and challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. **Data Categorization:** Data from various sources is categorized into relevant themes, such as the teacher's role, cultural influences in learning, and curriculum implementation challenges. **Synthesis and Integration:** Research findings are synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy can be integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum. **Critical Analysis:** A critical analysis is conducted to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation and how Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts can provide solutions to the existing challenges.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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

Ki Hajar Dewantara is one of the most highly respected figures in Indonesian education. His ideas, which encompass various aspects of education, from educational philosophy to teaching methods, have significantly influenced Indonesia's education system. His thoughts remain highly relevant to the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*), which is currently being implemented in Indonesia.

Ki Hajar Dewantara's well-known philosophy, *Ing ngarso sung tulodo, ing madyo mangun karso*,



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*tut wuri bandayani* (in the front, setting an example; in the middle, inspiring enthusiasm; in the back, providing encouragement), highlights the crucial role of educators in supporting students' development. This philosophy reflects the importance of a holistic education that emphasizes character development, independence, and creativity.

The Independent Curriculum, introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek), aims to provide students with the freedom to choose their learning paths and methods according to their interests and talents. This aligns closely with Ki Hajar Dewantara's belief that education should not be coercive but should allow students the freedom to develop according to their potential. According to research by Rahmawati (2021), the implementation of the Independent Curriculum aims to create a more adaptive learning environment that responds to technological advancements and societal changes while also acknowledging Indonesia's cultural diversity. In this context, Ki Hajar Dewantara's emphasis on culture-based learning becomes highly relevant, as he advocated for the importance of diversity and tolerance in education.

According to Dewantara, education should support the comprehensive development of individuals—intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Therefore, the Independent Curriculum, which provides space for life skills and character development, aligns well with his educational vision. Furthermore, a study by Setiawan (2021) indicates that the principle of *tut wuri bandayani* is highly relevant to the philosophy of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes the role of teachers as facilitators who provide encouragement and guidance rather than merely delivering instructional material. This is also evident in many practical applications in the field, where teachers are expected to motivate and guide students, fostering their enthusiasm for independent learning.

### Challenges in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

Despite the many advantages offered by the Independent Curriculum, its implementation is not always easy. One of the main challenges in implementing the curriculum is the readiness of educators. Research by Suryadi (2020) indicates that most teachers in Indonesia still struggle to adapt to the changes introduced by the Independent Curriculum. Many teachers are accustomed to conventional teaching methods that focus on structured and rigid content delivery. In such systems, teachers act more as information transmitters rather than facilitators





who guide and provide students with the freedom to explore learning materials based on their interests.

The lack of teacher proficiency in applying project-based or competency-based learning approaches is also a significant obstacle. This issue arises due to inadequate training and professional development opportunities for teachers in the field. According to Setiawan (2021), many teachers feel unprepared to implement the Independent Curriculum because they are unfamiliar with more creative and flexible teaching methods, such as project-based or problem-based learning.

Additionally, limited infrastructure and resources in some schools present another barrier to the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Research conducted by Wulandari et al. (2022) found that many schools, particularly those in remote areas, lack the necessary facilities to support innovative and technology-based learning activities. This situation creates a significant gap between schools in well-developed regions and those in underprivileged areas, ultimately affecting the success of curriculum implementation.

Many schools also face challenges in managing human resources. In some institutions, the shortage of qualified teachers or the lack of access to relevant training makes it difficult for them to adopt more dynamic teaching approaches. Suryadi (2020) revealed that although educational policies have established the Independent Curriculum as a solution to existing issues, its implementation in the field is often hindered by these persistent limitations.

### **Integration of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Thoughts in the Independent Curriculum**

One way to address these challenges is by integrating Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy into the Independent Curriculum. His principles on the importance of learning freedom, character development, and the role of teachers as mentors remain highly relevant in today's educational context. As stated by Rahmawati (2021), educators must act as facilitators who provide students with the space to develop their potential according to their interests and talents.

In this context, the concept of *Ing ngarso sung tulodo* teaches that a teacher should serve as a role model for students. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering knowledge but also for instilling good attitudes and behaviors. The principle of *Ing madyo mangun karso*, which emphasizes that during the learning process, teachers must foster enthusiasm and motivation in



students, is crucial in implementing project-based and competency-based learning approaches that require active student participation. In this role, teachers act as facilitators, guiding students through the learning process rather than merely delivering information.

Furthermore, the principle of *Tut wuri bandayani*, which suggests that teachers should encourage behind, is also highly relevant within the framework of the Independent Curriculum. In this approach, students are given the freedom to choose their learning paths, while teachers act as supporters who provide motivation, allowing students to explore and develop their potential freely. This aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara's belief that education should grant learners the freedom to grow according to their aspirations and needs.

According to research by Wulandari et al. (2022), project-based learning in the Independent Curriculum allows students to take a more independent role in seeking information and developing their skills. By integrating Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational values—such as freedom, creativity, and character development—this project-based learning approach can become more effective and meaningful for students.

### **Implications for Educational Policy**

The integration of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy into the Independent Curriculum has significant implications for education policy in Indonesia. One of the key aspects is the need for more intensive teacher training to ensure they can understand and effectively implement the principles of the Independent Curriculum. Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasized that teachers are not merely conveyors of information but also facilitators who guide students in discovering their full potential. Therefore, teacher training should cover not only pedagogical aspects but also skills in utilizing educational technology, which has become an integral part of modern learning. According to research by Rahmawati (2021), technology-based training can enhance learning effectiveness and assist teachers in adopting more innovative and competency-based approaches.

Additionally, education policies must focus on the development of human resources in the education sector, both in terms of quality and quantity. This can be achieved by improving access to professional training and education for teachers, as well as providing incentives for those who successfully implement competency-based and project-based learning. In this regard, Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy on balancing learning freedom with teacher guidance is highly





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relevant, as an ideal education system allows students to learn independently while still receiving appropriate direction from educators. Research by Setiawan (2021) indicates that schools applying the *Tut Wuri Handayani* principle tend to achieve better learning outcomes, as students are granted both autonomy and proper guidance tailored to their needs.

Policies supporting the use of technology in education are also crucial, given that many schools still lack the necessary facilities to implement the Independent Curriculum effectively. Research conducted by Wulandari et al. (2022) found that many schools in remote areas face significant limitations in terms of internet access, technological devices, and teacher training in utilizing educational technology effectively. Therefore, policies aimed at improving educational infrastructure, particularly in underprivileged regions, will be instrumental in reducing disparities and ensuring the equitable implementation of the Independent Curriculum across Indonesia. Furthermore, collaboration between the government, the private sector, and educational institutions is essential to ensure that schools have access to adequate resources for implementing technology-based and project-based learning.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy has strong relevance to the concept and implementation of the Independent Curriculum. His philosophy, which emphasizes a balance between learning freedom and teacher guidance, aligns with the core principles of the Independent Curriculum, which provides students with the flexibility to develop according to their interests and talents. The principle of "*Ing ngarso sung tulodo, ing madyo mangun karso, tut wuri handayani*" serves as the foundation for the teacher's role as a facilitator who supports students' holistic development.

However, in practice, the Independent Curriculum faces various challenges, particularly regarding teacher readiness, infrastructure limitations, and inadequate resources. Many educators struggle to adapt to project-based and competency-based learning methods, which require a more flexible and creative approach. Additionally, disparities in educational facilities between schools in developed areas and those in remote regions pose a significant obstacle to the equitable implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

To address these challenges, integrating Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy



into the Independent Curriculum serves as a relevant solution. By embedding the values of freedom, creativity, and character development into the education system, learning can become more meaningful for students. Teachers should receive more intensive training to ensure they understand and effectively implement the principles of the Independent Curriculum. Furthermore, education policies must support infrastructure improvements and increase access to educational technology, especially for schools in underprivileged areas.

Thus, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum based on Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy is expected to create a more adaptive, inclusive, and future-oriented education system. Through policies that strengthen the role of teachers, enhance the quality of human resources, and ensure equitable access to education, the Independent Curriculum can serve as an effective instrument in achieving a higher quality and more equitable education system in Indonesia.

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