The Concept of Islamic Religious Education in Ki Hajar Dewantara's Thought and Its Relevance in the Digital Era

Mahariani[1]*, La Karim[2], Amirul Salam[3], Rasidah[4]
[1234]STAI Wakatobi, Indonesia

[1]maharianistaiwakatobi@gmail.com; [2]drslakarimmm@gmail.com;
[3]amirulsalamstaiwakatobi@gmail.com. [4]ragilrasidah@gmail.com

***maharianistaiwakatobi@gmail.com**

Keywords

Education, Islam, Digital Era, Ki Hajar Dewantara

Abstract

This article examines the concept of Islamic religious education from the perspective of Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought and explores its relevance in the current digital era. Ki Hajar Dewantara, as a pioneer of Indonesian national education, is known for his educational philosophy that emphasizes character formation, freedom of thought, and commitment to humanistic and cultural values. Although he did not explicitly formulate a model of Islamic religious education, his ideas are rich in religious values and spirituality aligned with Islamic principles, such as freedom in learning (the among system), teacher as role model, and the balance between intellectual, emotional, and volitional development. These are encapsulated in three core values: *ing ngarsa sung tuladha* (in front, setting an example), *ing madya mangun karsa* (in the middle, inspiring initiative), and *tut wuri handayani* (at the back, providing support). In the digital era, marked by information disruption, changes in social interaction patterns, and the rise of online learning platforms, Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational values have become increasingly relevant. This article highlights how his educational principles can be integrated into digital Islamic religious education through a holistic, humanistic, and contextual approach. The study uses a literature review method with qualitative analysis of Ki Hajar Dewantara's works and contemporary literature on religious education and digital technology. The analysis shows that his ideas can serve as a strong philosophical foundation for developing a model of Islamic religious education that is technologically adaptive yet firmly rooted in noble values. Therefore, his ideas are not only historically relevant but also strategically significant for addressing the challenges of Islamic education in the digital age.

Introduction

Education plays a central role in shaping individual personality and character. In the Indonesian context, which upholds religious values, Islamic Religious Education holds a strategic role in shaping the character and morality of the younger generation. This type of education is not merely a transfer of knowledge about Islam, but also a means to guide individuals toward a better life by upholding spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social values (Zahra et al., 2024).

Islamic Religious Education is a process that directs individuals toward a more meaningful life and elevates human dignity according to their basic capacities and learning potential (Sugiharto & Nurani, 2022). In a globalized era filled with moral challenges and the decline of values, the urgency of Islamic Religious Education becomes increasingly evident and cannot be underestimated.

Islamic Religious Education is not only about conveying information about Islam, but aims to shape a complete Muslim personality—faithful, devout, virtuous, and capable of living harmoniously in society (Siti et al., 2022). Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System states that "Education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process in which learners actively develop their potential to possess religious-spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed by themselves, their society, nation, and state." This aligns with the goals of Islamic Religious Education, which seeks to instill religious values as a guide for life, reflected in students' behavior and character—not merely to fulfill intellectual needs (Kamila, 2023).

The character developed through Islamic Religious Education does not emerge instantly. Character formation requires time and a process of internalizing values, which must be cultivated from early childhood through adulthood. Values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, patience, hard work, tolerance, and discipline originate from the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which serve as lifelong guidance for Muslims (Astuti et al., 2023). Islamic Religious Education teaches that character is a collection of values, attitudes, and behaviors that serve as the foundation for interacting with one's environment and others (Kamila, 2023).

This process of character formation is also influenced by examples and role models in daily life. As taught in Islamic education, role modeling (*uswatun hasanah*) is a vital method for shaping students' character. The universal values of Islam encompass all aspects of human life, providing a strong foundation for character development not only in schools but also within families and communities.

Ki Hajar Dewantara, a key figure in Indonesian education, offered a holistic educational approach that aligns closely with the Islamic educational system—particularly through the application of the boarding school or *pondok pesantren* model (Sugiharto & Nurani, 2022). This system not only imparts academic knowledge but also integrates moral and character development into a unified whole. Education, in this context, is a way to guide children in accordance with their nature and potential toward a better life.

Furthermore, Ki Hajar Dewantara rejected a purely theoretical approach to moral education. For him, character (*budi pekerti*) cannot be taught only through lectures or abstract explanations of right and wrong. Instead, moral values must be practiced directly in everyday life through the habituation of civilized attitudes and behaviors (Zainuddin, 2021). This view is highly consistent with the Islamic educational method, which emphasizes role modeling (*uswatun hasanah*) as a means of forming student character.

Islamic Religious Education plays a central role in shaping students' character, especially in the digital era, which presents numerous moral challenges. The moral values embedded in Islamic teachings—such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, discipline, and cooperation—are not merely taught theoretically but are internalized and practiced in daily life (Salisah et al., 2024). In this regard, Islamic Religious Education is not solely about teaching religious doctrine; it is also about shaping individuals with noble character who are prepared to face the complexities of social life, including the effects of globalization and technological advancements that can erode human values.

One of the crucial aspects of Islamic Religious Education is the application of religious values in accordance with the child's developmental stage, both within the family environment and in educational institutions. The family is the first and foremost environment in shaping a child's character. Through religious education provided at home, children are taught to understand and internalize spiritual values derived from Islamic teachings, which function as a moral filter in facing life's challenges. Therefore, early religious education becomes the primary foundation for shaping a child's character, personality, and mindset (Parhan & Kurniawan, 2020).

By instilling Islamic values, it is expected that children will grow into individuals who are excellent, faithful, noble in character, broad-minded, and capable of contributing to society as good citizens (Rufaedah, 2020). Islamic Religious Education in the family also allows parents to teach moral principles that are not only related to acts of worship but also to everyday behavior, such as honesty, patience, and responsibility. This process is then continued and reinforced in formal educational institutions, where children can further develop themselves within a broader social environment.

Islamic Religious Education also focuses on the internalization of spiritual teachings and the development of morality, virtue, empathy, and social justice (Kamila, 2023). At this stage, Islamic education aims not merely to teach religious theory but to cultivate good habits in daily life. Children are trained to develop spiritual awareness, respond wisely to conflict, and strengthen their identity and sense of responsibility as Muslims. This character formation has an impact on children's moral, spiritual, and social development—both in the family, at school, and within society (Somad, 2021).

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research method. Qualitative research emphasizes argumentation based on interpretation and is often considered an art form due to its high degree of subjectivity (Harahap, 2020; Sugiyono, 2012). Furthermore,

Creswell (2015) explains that the qualitative research process involves essential efforts such as posing questions and procedures, collecting specific data, and conducting inductive analysis that moves from particular themes to broader generalizations.

The study also adopts both library and field research approaches. The researcher reviews primary literature sources, including journal articles, books, and research reports that present the educational thought of Ki Hajar Dewantara as a prominent educational figure (Adlini et al., 2022). This study also employs a critical paradigm, which defines social science as a critical process of uncovering the "real structure" behind the illusion of false needs as manifested by the material world, with the aim of helping people raise awareness and drive social transformation to improve their living conditions (Halik, 2018).

Results & Discussion

The Concept of Islamic Religious Education According to Ki Hajar Dewantara

Islamic education plays a significant role in helping the younger generation overcome social problems such as juvenile delinquency, violence, and drug abuse by instilling values like patience, perseverance, piety, self-confidence, and courage to face life's challenges (Astuti et al., 2023). Islamic Religious Education not only teaches worship and rituals but also provides practical guidance on how to live a life full of challenges, both in the digital world and in society.

Ki Hajar Dewantara's views on education are highly relevant to this discussion. As cited in the work of Fachri Sugiharto (Sugiharto & Nurani, 2022), Ki Hajar Dewantara considered education as a process encompassing nationalism, humanity, and Islamic values. He emphasized that religion is the main foundation of education, as it teaches about the existence of Almighty God, who governs everything perfectly, and the belief in eternal life after this world. In this regard, religious education teaches individuals to fulfill God's commands and avoid His prohibitions, which are absolute duties for every human being as His servant.

According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, education should not only transmit knowledge but also shape character, morality, and personal identity. He believed that education must guide each child to recognize their personal responsibility to God, and thus form individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also spiritually strong and morally upright.

According to Sulton, as cited by Muhammad Faizin et al., education in Islam is seen as a lifelong process that aims to develop humans holistically and continuously (Faizin et al., 2023). This view aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy that individuals must continue learning from birth to death as a form of responsibility toward themselves. Furthermore, both Islamic education and Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought emphasize the importance of three educational environments as the foundation for the growth of values and intelligence: the family as the foundation of character, the school as the center of scientific development, and the community as a space for the internalization of social and moral values (Perdani et al., 2024).

In addition to religious education, moral or character education is also a crucial pillar in shaping religious character. Moral education aims to equip learners with the ability to

distinguish right from wrong and to foster good attitudes and behaviors in social interactions (Kamila, 2023). This value cultivation process is known as character education—a systematic effort to internalize noble principles within learners. Islamic education plays a vital role in shaping the character of the younger generation by instilling moral values such as honesty, empathy, and a positive attitude toward others, thus producing strong individuals who are prepared to face future challenges (Astuti et al., 2023).

In an article titled "The Importance of Islamic Religious Education in Shaping Children's Character" by Momod Abdul Somad (2021), it is explained that Islamic Religious Education plays a vital role in shaping children's noble character by instilling spiritual values from an early age, especially within the family as the first educational environment. Through this, children can develop strong personalities aligned with Islamic teachings. In this sense, religious education functions as a moral foundation that guides children to avoid ethical violations and shapes them into religious, knowledgeable, and righteous individuals.

Furthermore, according to Momod Abdul Somad (2021), Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role in shaping students' character in the digital era, which is full of moral challenges. Values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, discipline, and cooperation are not only taught theoretically but are also internalized through daily life practices. This is supported by active learning methods such as discussions and case studies, which encourage students to become responsible individuals, respect diversity, and collaborate effectively in various situations (Somad, 2021).

In alignment with this view, Salisah et al. (2024) highlight the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in character development in the digital age. Through a literature review, they found that integrating IRE with digital technology can enhance learning effectiveness while reinforcing students' moral and ethical values. IRE plays an important role in instilling honesty, responsibility, and spiritual awareness, all of which are essential for navigating moral challenges in today's digital society. Their study emphasizes the importance of collaboration among schools, parents, and communities to create an educational environment that is conducive to the development of strong character and adaptability to technological advancements.

During Ki Hajar Dewantara's time, Perguruan Taman Siswa broadly implemented education focused on character formation—beginning with nurturing from birth in the family, followed by structured learning in schools and communities, and instilling a sense of patriotism from an early age (Setyorini & Asiah, 2021). To effectively develop student character, three main approaches are required: integrating character values into the learning process, strengthening cooperation between schools, parents, and the community, and habituating these values within the school environment (Kamila, 2023). In line with this, Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasized the importance of the Tri Pusat Pendidikan (Three Educational Centers)—the family, the school, and the community—as the primary environments for character development. These three domains must work in harmony, as character education and social awareness can only flourish through the synergy of these environments within the framework of social culture (Setyorini & Asiah, 2021).

Educational Methods of Ki Hajar Dewantara

Ki Hajar Dewantara is a central figure in the history of Indonesian education. Born as Raden Mas Soewardi Soerjaningrat on May 2, 1889, he is widely recognized as a pioneer of national education and the founder of Perguruan Taman Siswa (Perdani et al., 2024).

Throughout his career, he made significant contributions by designing an educational system that aimed to liberate Indonesians from the chains of colonialism, both physically and mentally. In the realm of education, Ki Hajar Dewantara introduced original ideas grounded in the cultural values of the nation and upheld the principle of individual freedom within the learning process. His thoughts remain relevant not only during the colonial era but also serve as a foundational framework for the national education system today (Forisma & Hidayat, 2023).

One of Ki Hajar Dewantara's most famous concepts is encapsulated in the Javanese motto: "*Ing ngarsa sung tuladha, ing madya mangun karsa, tut wuri handayani.*" This phrase carries profound meaning regarding the role of educators in guiding learners. When leading from the front, the teacher must be an exemplary figure. While positioned among the students, the teacher fosters enthusiasm and initiative. When at the back, the teacher provides encouragement and motivation (Forisma & Hidayat, 2023). This perspective illustrates Ki Hajar Dewantara's view of education as a dynamic and humane process where the teacher-student relationship is not a rigid, one-way interaction but a mutually constructive relationship based on affection and understanding.

According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, an ideal education nurtures nationalism and love for the homeland without fostering hatred for other nations, as true nationalism does not eliminate humanity (Indah, 2021). In the educational system he developed, Ki Hajar Dewantara employed an approach known as the among method, which refers to teaching and educational methods based on the principles of *asah, asih, asuh*—cultivating skills, love, and care aligned with Indonesian cultural values (Setyorini & Asiah, 2021).

The among method derives from the word "*momong*," meaning to nurture or care for. It describes an approach to educating children with gentleness, attentiveness, and affection similar to how a mother guides her child (Sugiharto & Nurani, 2022). Educators using the among method are not authoritarian figures but rather role models who inspire, motivate, and position themselves as friends, creating a conducive learning atmosphere. This environment allows character values to be effectively instilled through example, closeness, and ongoing moral encouragement (Fajri & Trisuryanti, 2021). In the among system, learners are regarded as developing individuals with an inherent potential to become good persons. To support their growth, they require role models, encouragement, and guided freedom. Learners are also grouped by age to ensure the learning process aligns with their psychological development stages (Fajri & Trisuryanti, 2021).

The among method strongly rejects violence, coercion, or punitive measures that impose pressure during learning (Mahmudah et al., 2024). On the contrary, true education is one that naturally fosters moral awareness and responsibility within the learner. In a free learning atmosphere, children develop healthier mental and emotional states. They do not feel oppressed but are driven by curiosity and intrinsic motivation. This aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara's principle that genuine education is education that liberates humanity (Mahmudah et al., 2024).

Moreover, according to Ki Hajar Dewantara, education must be child-centered (Fajri & Trisuryanti, 2021). He held a very progressive view by positioning learners as the main subjects in the educational process. This system *employs* a method that encourages students to *Ngerti* (understand), *Ngrasa* (feel), and Nglakoni (practice) through exemplary modeling, as expressed in Ki Hajar Dewantara's motto and the three guiding principles of the Among system: being a role model (*Ing Ngarso Sung Tuladha*), providing encouragement and motivation (Ing *Madyo Mangun Karsa*), and giving support (*Tut Wuri Handayani*). The approach prioritizes affection and the principle of freedom in learning, aiming not only to develop students' intellectual abilities but also to nurture their moral character effectively (Fajri & Trisuryanti, 2021).

The Among system emphasizes teaching methods that raise learners' self-awareness and encourage them to act according to their knowledge, since the ultimate goal of education is individual freedom. Ki Hajar Dewantara outlined four stages of learning development: the first stage (ages 5–8) focuses on instilling basic understanding of good and bad; the second stage (ages 9–12) habituates good behavior; the third stage (ages 14–16) guides students in evaluating their actions; and the fourth stage (ages 17–20) stresses awareness and responsibility for their deeds (Efendy, 2023).

Today, the Among system is still widely applied in education, including in Indonesian scouting education. The Scout Movement, as a provider of nonformal education outside school and family environments, adopts the Among system as its foundation alongside the basic principles and methods of scouting (Fajri & Trisuryanti, 2021). Beyond scouting, the Among system remains relevant to the broader Indonesian educational context, especially in the development of professional teachers. Teachers are required to possess four integrated competencies as mandated by Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers: pedagogical, professional, personality, and social competencies. These competencies are applied in harmony with Ki Hajar Dewantara's teachings in the Taman Siswa principles, which emphasize orderly speech and action, greetings, peace, and happiness (Fajri & Trisuryanti, 2021).

The Relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Educational Concept in the Digital Era

One example of applying the trilogy teachings (*Ing ngarsa sung tuladha*, *Ing madya mangun karsa*, and *Tut wuri handayani*) at the junior high school level involves several steps. These include designing creative learning activities that avoid boredom without compromising the learning objectives. Additionally, providing praise and rewards to students who actively participate in lessons is important—for instance, in online learning, appreciating students who keep their cameras on and actively respond or ask questions (Makalew & Mentang, 2023).

Some applications of this educational concept at the senior high school and vocational school levels are described as follows (Putri, 2016):

a. Implementation of *Ing Ngarso Sung Tuladha*: The teacher, when delivering material or interacting with students, should prioritize politeness and gentle language. The goal is for students to emulate these behaviors in their communication with peers and develop a habit of respecting teachers. Additionally, teachers should avoid embarrassing students

who fail to submit assignments by providing alternative individual tasks. Teachers also acknowledge and appreciate students who submit assignments on time.

b. Implementation of *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa*: When the teacher is close to students, they must be able to motivate a sense of togetherness, encouraging behavioral changes collectively to achieve shared goals.

c. Implementation of *Tut Wuri Handayani*: This principle reflects leadership in education. Teachers must guide and show students the way when they face difficulties, particularly in overcoming learning challenges.

The implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy, based on the principles of *Ing ngarsa sung tuladha*, *Ing madya mangun karsa*, and *Tut wuri handayani*, in the learning management at Pesantren Bina Tauhid Amaliyah Putra demonstrates the successful integration of these values through the following practices (Fauziah et al., 2025):

a. The implementation of the *Ing ngarsa sung tuladha* concept is realized through exemplary behavior demonstrated by teachers in the daily lives of students. These examples include discipline, honesty, independence, and noble character.

b. The implementation of the *Ing madya mangun karsa* concept is reflected in the role of teachers as motivators and facilitators of learning. Teachers foster students' enthusiasm and creativity by providing encouragement, guidance, and employing innovative and enjoyable teaching methods. This includes creating an interactive learning environment through discussions, practical activities, and personalized approaches to understanding each student's potential, as well as applying reward and punishment systems.

c. The implementation of the *Tut wuri handayani* concept is embodied by granting students the freedom and responsibility to learn independently while still offering guidance and support. Teachers also reward students for making independent choices and decisions, such as selecting extracurricular activities, managing their time, and organizing daily routines.

Challenges and Opportunities in Integrating Ki Hajar Dewantara's Educational Concepts in the Digital Era

The integration of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational concepts faces various challenges and obstacles stemming from internal and external factors. Internal challenges involve the roles of teachers, students, and parents, while external factors include curriculum design, facilities and infrastructure, and educational policies. The following outlines the challenges in implementing these educational concepts (Widyalistyorini et al., 2023):

a. The first internal challenge is that teachers must possess adequate understanding of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational theories and be able to apply them in teaching practice. However, not all teachers have such comprehension. Moreover, implementing these concepts requires changes in teachers' mindsets and teaching styles.

b. The second internal challenge is that students must have motivation and willingness to learn. Yet, not all students possess sufficient motivation and willingness, thus necessitating a shift in students' thinking patterns regarding learning priorities.

c. The third internal challenge concerns parental support. Parents need to support the learning process and curriculum implemented at school. However, some parents prefer traditional teacher-centered learning methods rather than new approaches.

External challenges that serve as references in implementing this educational concept include (Widyalistyorini et al., 2023):

a. Curriculum also poses a challenge in the application of this concept because the current curriculum in Indonesia is still outcome-oriented, focusing on student learning results. This is in stark contrast to the educational concept that emphasizes the learning process.

b. Facilities and infrastructure are challenges in implementing Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational concept since it requires adequate facilities such as comfortable classrooms, complete learning aids, and smooth internet access in the digital era. Unfortunately, not all schools have these facilities.

c. Educational policy represents another external challenge. The current education policies in Indonesia do not fully support the implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational theory. Issues include policies related to the allocation of education funding, frequent policy changes, and the readiness of teaching staff affected by these policies.

Opportunities to overcome challenges and obstacles in the implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational concept require several key steps as follows (Widyalistyorini et al., 2023):

a. To improve teacher competence, the government needs to organize training sessions, seminars, and workshops on this educational concept.

b. The government and schools should collaborate to enhance students' motivation and willingness to learn by funding and organizing tutoring, extracurricular activities, and other positive programs.

c. The government, together with schools, should conduct socialization efforts such as visits and joint forums with parents to raise awareness about the importance of implementing Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational concept.

d. The current curriculum in Indonesia needs to be revised by incorporating elements of Ki Hajar Dewantara's concept, including adding relevant points and removing outdated elements to better suit the needs of today's students.

e. The government should increase educational funding to support the development of adequate facilities and infrastructure, facilitating the application of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational concept.

f. Educational policies in Indonesia need to be revised to give more attention to the learning process of students and should be stabilized to avoid frequent changes, thus better supporting the implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational concept.

Conclusion

In the context of Islamic education, being a role model and example is a crucial aspect of creating quality education. Within Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy, this attitude is represented by the value of *Ing ngarsa sung tuladha* (leading by example). The concept of

leadership through exemplary behavior becomes a strategic value in education so that learners have figures to emulate.

Meanwhile, *Ing madya mangun karsa* (leading from the middle to build motivation) signifies the need for a balanced and moderate attitude to grow within the educated soul. Consequently, the morals and ethics that arise reflect this balance and fairness. Finally, *Tut wuri handayani* (leading from behind by supporting) means that every individual should respect and obey their leader or mentor. For educators, this concept implies that teachers must encourage students to develop both cognitively and morally.

Authorship Contribution Statement

The completion of this article would not have been possible without the contributions of several authors. First, Mahariani was responsible for drafting the initial ideas and collecting literature data on Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy. Next, La Karim and Amirul Salam analyzed the data and developed the article's design framework. Meanwhile, Rasidah took charge of the final writing and editing of the article.

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