



On Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy of education

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Abstract

This comparative education article explores the purpose of education in the Indonesian context. My aim is to see if there are any differences between the purpose of education during the colonial era and present-day Indonesia. In order to do that, I draw mostly on the philosophy of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, who is regarded as the father of Indonesian education. This article is particularly relevant because the Indonesian government has recently started to critically re-examine two of the educational concepts proposed by Dewantara, which are "*pendidikan karakter*" (character education) and "*merdeka belajar*" (independent learning). In conceptualising education, Dewantara, who was influenced by Tagore, Montessori, and Fröbel, saw the importance of imparting local wisdom and values ignored by the colonial schools. Therefore, in this article, I will compare his educational views with the Dutch view of schooling during the colonial era. I will then look at Indonesia's current approach to education to find the similarities and differences of purpose relative to Dewantara's views of education. In this article, I argue that Dewantara's philosophy is still very much relevant today. I conclude that the Indonesian government should refer back to its history when defining education for its next generation.

Keywords: Indonesia, Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Philosophy of Education

Introduction

In this article, I will discuss the purpose of education using Indonesia as a context. My starting point will be in the 1920s, focusing on the educational philosophy of Ki Hadjar Dewantara. Dewantara is a pioneer in the field of education in the Dutch East Indies, which later gained independence as Indonesia. This study considers how education in Indonesia has (or has not) changed over the decades. With that objective, I compare the concept of education in three types of schools: Dewantara's schools and Dutch (Colonial) schools in the 1920s, and finally current approaches to schooling in Indonesia today. This paper re-examines the purpose of education and explores whether Dewantara's philosophy is still relevant in today's society. I will first provide a background discussion on the purpose of education before introducing Dewantara. I will then look more closely at his philosophy of education, which was influenced by, among others, Rabindranath Tagore, Maria Montessori, and Friedrich Fröbel. I will contrast the purpose of his schools and the Dutch schools during the colonial time. I will then bring in contemporary examples to demonstrate similarities and differences. I will argue that the Indonesian schooling system has long emphasised the creation of skilled labourers. To some

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extent, this is similar to the purpose of the Dutch Schools in the 1920s. However, the recently updated national curriculum, with its incorporation of 'character education' and 'independent learning' suggests a growing recognition of the significance of Dewantara's ideas. I conclude that Dewantara's philosophy of education is still very much relevant in Indonesia today and, therefore, suggest the importance of examining his thoughts more closely from an international perspective.

What is the purpose of education?

The word "education" comes from two Latin words. The first word, "*educare*", means to train or to mould. In this view, education's importance is to preserve knowledge; educators pass on their knowledge to their students. This approach calls for rote learning, where students learn from memorisation. The second word, "*educere*", means to lead out. In this view, education is seen as a tool to prepare for changes. Thus, it requires critical thinking, creativity, and innovation (Bass & Good, 2004; Craft, 1984). These two different concepts represent the current central conceptions of the purpose of education internationally.

Burbules and Warnick (2006, p. 491) proposed ten methods of philosophical inquiry about education, one of them focusing on the purposes of education. Debates regarding the purpose of education can be viewed by looking at who benefits from education (p. 496). Some scholars look at the intrinsic value of education, where education is valued by the individual. Acquiring knowledge in itself is the result rather than a means to an end (Koosgard, 1983). This knowledge acquisition can enhance one's appreciation of the field of knowledge (McCowan, 2012, p. 118). In addition, in higher education settings, universities also provide a space for students to critically develop their self-realisation (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 30) and give students an opportunity-making space to rethink and expand their aspirational possibilities (Walker, 2018, p. 129). Thus, the purpose of education is not just to acquire knowledge but also to reflect on oneself.

Other researchers focus on the instrumental value of education, where the purpose of education is to benefit society. For example, Dewey (1916) suggested that promoting democracy should be the central aim of education. Studies have also shown that the level of education correlates with levels of civic participation (Brand, 2010; Dee, 2006; McMahan, 2007, 2009). The most common approach, however, is to look at education as an investment. A series of studies commissioned by the World Bank emphasised the economic gains of education (Psacharopoulos, 1972, 1973, 1981, 1985), noting that acquiring a higher level of education translates to higher income that helps build the economy of the country. Several empirical studies such as in Vietnam (Doan & Stevens, 2011; Glewwe et al., 2002), the Philippines (Schady, 2003), and Pakistan (Afzal, 2011) have shown such a link. However, this approach often relies on a narrow concept of education.

In a narrow concept of education, learning takes place in a controlled situation and is related to schooling or training, which prepares students for a vocation (Aggarwal, 2010, p. 13). However, in a broader concept, education is seen as an ongoing process of life which can take place anywhere. "*Bildung*" is one notable example of this wider view of education. *Bildung* is a concept which emerged in late 18th century Germany, initially with a strong religious purpose. However, it was articulated as a "specific structure of education" in the late 19th century

(Blankertz, 1983, as cited in Masschelein & Ricken, 2003). It is hard to precisely explain *Bildung* in English because there is no single word that allows direct translation from the German (Varkøy, 2010, p. 86). *Bildung* is an ongoing process of learning that results in personal and cultural maturation (Gidley, 2016, p. 87), but also involves individual self-realisation in all spheres of social reproduction (Masschelein & Ricken, 2003, p. 140). Moreover, Danner (1994, p. 5) suggested that *Bildung* is a process and status of a "cultured person" with three main components; the knowledge that is mastered and criticised, the question of value orientation and quality, and the responsibility for the human community.

In this article, I will highlight that there should be a balance between the intrinsic and instrumental values of education. In addition, since education is an ongoing learning process, it should have a broader concept, not necessarily only take place in classroom settings. Education should also provide a degree of freedom and independence. These three important aspects of education have been highlighted by various educators and thinkers. For example, according to Maria Montessori, education is a way to create a free learning environment that helps children to reach their fullest potential and become an adult who contributes to society (Montessori, 1949). Her emphasis on the importance of learning from nature (Montessori, 1948) shows that learning should not be constrained by the four walls of classroom. Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore put freedom at the centre of his idea of education, this included free interaction with nature (Tagore, 1929). He also put an emphasis on unity in harmony (Tagore, 2003, p. 78), suggesting the importance of international brotherhood. According to him, although an individual belongs to one nation, the individual shares the world with citizens of other countries (p.81). Thus, education should promote intercultural understanding for the unity of mankind. Likewise, Frederich Fröbel put forward the idea of student-centred learning to give children a degree of freedom and independence. He suggested that the most important aspect of children's education is to understand and recognise nature (Fröbel, 1967). This is why gardening is an important aspect in his schools. He was a strong proponent of a play-based curriculum and rejected rote learning and punishment (Strauch-Nelson, 2012). With this type of education, children will be able to develop their self-awareness and will grow to be adults who support the wellbeing of themselves and others (Serry, 2012). The views of Montessori, Tagore, Fröbel can also be seen reflected in the educational views of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, a pioneer in the field of education in what is now known as Indonesia.

Ki Hadjar Dewantara

Ki Hadjar Dewantara was born in 1889 into the Javanese royal house of Paku Alam, with the birth name Raden Mas Suwardi Suryaningrat. He later changed his name to Ki Hadjar Dewantara and dropped his aristocratic title of "Raden Mas". Dewantara was enrolled at a *kweekschool* (a Dutch school to train teachers) but later transferred to STOVIA (a Dutch school to train local doctors). However, he did not complete his studies due to illness (Muthoifin, 2015, p. 302). At that time, only those who came from royal, noble, or upper-class families could attend schools.

Dewantara was an active member of *Budi Utomo* (literally 'Noble Endeavour'), a pioneering social, culture, and political organisation in the Dutch East Indies. During his time in Budi Utomo, he further developed a political, social, and cultural consciousness (Scherer, 1975, p.

75). He worked for, among others, the *De Express* newspaper and wrote his first article titled *Kemerdekaan Indonesia* (Indonesian Independence). Together with D. Dekker and T. Mangoenkoesoemo, he established a short-lived political organisation, the *Indische Partij* (Indies Party), in 1912. The following year, he published his most well-known work, an article titled *Als ik een Nederlander was* (If I were a Dutch Man) which heavily criticised the Dutch colonial government. This led to the disbandment of the party by the Dutch government because it was deemed to be a threat to the colonial government (Kelch, 2014, p. 16). The three founders were exiled to the Netherlands.

During his exile in the Netherlands, Dewantara started to revisit his interest in becoming an educator. Whilst there he completed a certificate in education (Yusuf, 1969, p. 21). In 1913, the same year Dewantara arrived in the Netherlands, Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore received the Nobel prize for literature. Dewantara met with Tagore once during his exile and was influenced by Tagore's ideas on education (Dewantara, 1962a; Tsuchiya, 1987, p. 41). While he was in exile, Dewantara was also exposed to other educators' views. In his writings, he shows his appreciation for the work of Maria Montessori (Dewantara, 1962a, 1962c) and Friedrich Fröbel (Dewantara, 1962e).

In 1918, after completing his period of exile, Dewantara returned to the Dutch Indies and participated in *Paguyuban Selasa-Kliwon*, a scholarly society for the discussion of Javanese mysticism that was led by Prince Surjamataram of Mangkunegara. The *Paguyuban* (Society) met every *Selasa* (Tuesday) that fell on the Kliwon day in the Javanese calendar, hence the name *Paguyuban Selasa-Kliwon*. The society agreed that there was a need for a Javanese education system that incorporated local wisdom. The society was disbanded when Dewantara opened the first *Taman Siswa* (Garden of Students) School because it had achieved its primary objective (McVey, 1967, p. 130).

Dewantara's Philosophy and Schools

As mentioned earlier, Dewantara appreciated the works of Tagore and Montessori. Both Tagore and Montessori visited Taman Siswa Schools. Tagore visited a Taman Siswa School in 1927 and some Taman Siswa students studied at Tagore's Santiniketen School (Gupta, 2002, p. 458). Montessori visited a Taman Siswa School in 1940 (McVey, 1967, p. 133).

Dewantara was also influenced by Fröbel. These can be seen in his education philosophy. Dewantara wrote four volumes on education, sharing his views of the different principles and concepts of education. For Dewantara, the purpose of education is to achieve perfection of human life, fulfilling the needs of both body and soul (Dewantara, 1962d). This is similar to Fröbel (1887) who suggested "*the purpose of education is to encourage and guide man as a conscious, thinking and perceiving being in such a way that he becomes a pure and perfect representation of that divine inner law through his own personal choice; education must show him the ways and meanings of attaining that goal*" (p.2).

Dewantara wrote his tripartite *tri ngo* concept of education, which includes *ngerti* (to understand), *ngroso* (to feel), and *lan nglakoni* (to act). Taken together, this means that education aims to understand and to feel what is around us so that we can implement actions that bring goodness to society (Wijayanti, 2018, p. 89). This is why in all of Dewantara's teachings, he emphasised the concept of *budi pekerti*, where the action is made because there

is a unity of mind, feeling, and willingness (Dewantara, 1962d, p. 484). Dewantara never used the word "*Bildung*" but his concepts were closely linked to the concept of self-realisation.

Dewantara also brought forward the three learning steps, called *tri N*. The first concept is *niteni*, which means to remember. The learner thereby uses their senses to do activities which help them to process and remember information. The second step is *niroke*, by which learners mimic or imitate the action that they have learned. Lastly, *nambahi*, which means to enrich, where learners develop their capabilities through the process of learning (Prihatni, 2014, p. 279).

The central principle of Dewantara's approach to education is the "sistem among" (literally "among system"), which does not translate easily into English. "Among" can be understood, however, as "sole" or "individual" and therefore learning should be based upon the student's unique nature (Radcliffe, 1971, p. 222). With this concept, Dewantara emphasised *merdeka belajar* (independent learning), whereby students should be at the centre of learning activity instead of the teacher. This is similar to the student-centred education proposed by Montessori and Fröbel. He explained the system using the concept of *tri mong*, whereby teachers' acts more like parents who should guide their children. Thus, in the process of learning, teachers should *momong* (take care), *among* (offer an example), and *ngemong* (observe), so that learners develop their knowledge based on how they make sense of the information and their surroundings, not simply because the teachers indoctrinate them.

Both Dewantara and Tagore opposed the colonial education system and suggested that it is important for indigenous populations to learn about their history and culture (Supardi et al., 2018). Both suggested the use of mother tongues in their teaching. In looking at education and culture, Dewantara viewed school as a place to promote local culture and recommended three attitudes towards culture, known as *tri con*. These attitudes are *continuity* (to preserve our unique identity and continue the traditional values and elements of our own culture), *concentricity* (to be open yet critical and selective towards other cultures before assimilating positive values of other cultures), and *convergency* (to work with other nations in building a universal world culture based on individual national characteristics) (Towaf, 2016, p. 169).

Dewantara, Montessori, Tagore, and Fröbel all acknowledged the importance of learning from nature (Dewantara, 1962d, 1964; Fröbel, 1967; Montessori, 1948; Tagore, 1929). Dewantara believed that lessons could be learned from nature, everyday objects, and everyday human interaction. He suggested the concept of *tri pusat pendidikan* (three centres of education); family, school, and environment. The responsibility to educate a child does not rely on teachers alone but also on their parents and the wider society (Saefuddin & Solahudin, 2009). Therefore parents, teachers, and the community must work together to raise an educated child.

Both Tagore and Dewantara saw the purpose of education as beyond economic concerns (Marzuki & Khanifah, 2016, p. 179). For Tagore, the purpose of education is to give a sense of identity as a "total man" or a whole person, in harmony with life. This is similar to Dewantara's concept of "life perfection" by fulfilling the needs of the body and soul. This concept is also related to the self-realisation concept in *Bildung*.

Both Tagore and Dewantara also saw the role of teachers as supporters or guides for their students. Tagore (1992) used the metaphor of teachers as gardeners with their role being to ensure the students (garden) flourishes. Dewantara explained the role of teachers as "*Ing ngarso sung tulodo. Ing madyo mangun karso. Tut wuri handayani*" (When the teachers are in front of

the student, they should set an example. When the teachers are in the middle they should raise the student's spirit and initiative. When the teachers are behind, they should encourage the student never to give up). If we use a metaphor of a teacher and a student walking together to demonstrate Dewantara's role of the teacher, we can see that the emphasis of education is the student's progress. Starting with the student walking behind the teacher, then alongside the teacher, and eventually in front of the teacher. This concept is closely linked to the *Among* system, where students learn independently.

Dewantara shared Montessori and Fröbel's views on student-centred learning and freedom in the classroom. This was done by acknowledging the importance of self-expression and adjusting teaching methods based on the students' capabilities (McVey, 1967, p. 133). In addition, all three believed that learning should be done through activities (experiential learning) and that it is important to use and develop the students' five senses (Rokhman et al., 2017, p. 120). Montessori's method, however, is more structured. The teacher's role is to be an instructor; to show students how to do things and let the students try themselves (Burnett, 1962, p. 73). Fröbel, on the other hand, used games and activities in class. He went on to develop unique materials such as wooden bricks and balls for his classroom activities. Dewantara chose to incorporate local cultures in the classroom, for example through dance, playing traditional musical instruments, or shadow puppets. This approach reflected the influence of Dewantara's participation in the *Paguyuban Selasa-Kliwon*.

One thing that sets Ki Hadjar Dewantara apart from his influencers was his greater attention to the finances underpinning education. For Dewantara, an educational institution needed to be self-sufficient. Thus, he suggested that an educational institution should have a branch that undertook profit-making activities (Muthoifin, 2015).

Dewantara's philosophy heavily influenced his schools and how they are operated. His first *Taman Siswa* (Garden of Students) school was established in Yogyakarta in 1922. The name shows a strong resemblance to Fröbel's "*kindergarten*", which shows Dewantara's recognition of Fröbel's ideas. *Taman Siswa* promoted seven fundamental principles, which reflected Dewantara's philosophy of education. The principles were 1) The right of a person to self-determination, 2) Educating children to be liberated in their spiritual life, thoughts, and energies, 3) Using one's civilisation and culture as signposts, to search for a new life, that is in accordance with our characters, and that gives us peace in our lives, 4) Education for all members of the society, 5) Working freely but guided by fundamental principles, 6) Independence in terms of funding, and 7) Educators should surrender themselves to serve the child (Dewantara, 1964, pp. 26–28).

***Taman Siswa* Schools vs Dutch Colonial Schools**

Dewantara's *Taman Siswa* schools were very unlike the Dutch Colonial schools. The difference between Dewantara's *Taman Siswa* schools and the Dutch colonial schools can be seen in four areas; purpose, methods, curriculum, and funding. It is to be acknowledged that during the 1920s, there were also Islamic schools. Unfortunately, there is insufficient space to discuss Islamic education in depth here. Detailed studies of Islamic Schools can be found in the work of Dhofier (1999) and Steenbrink (1986). It is also important to look at the Dutch schools' historical context in the Dutch Indies. In 1901 the Dutch colonial government introduced the

Ethical Policy, which was predicated on the view that there was a moral obligation for the colonial government to help improve conditions in the Dutch Indies. Although this policy was intended to prepare the Dutch Indies to be self-governed, the so-called "self-governed" nation was still very much under the control of the colonial government. This was reflected in the purpose of the Dutch Colonial schools, which set Dewantara's schools apart.

The first main area of difference between Dutch Colonial schools and Dewantara's schools was the purpose of education. A consequence of the *Ethical Policy* was the introduction of Western education for a select group of locals. To a large extent, although individual teachers may have had a broader view of education, the Dutch schools functioned as instruments to train an elite group of natives to support the running of the colonial government (Furnivall, 1944; Rahardjo, 2013, p. 2). Thus, Dutch schools served to perpetuate colonial gains, where students learned to work in the service of the colonial government, instead of teaching them to think critically for themselves. By contrast, *Taman Siswa* schools were established to achieve perfection of human life, fulfilling both the body and soul's needs. Thus, the emphasis was on the development of the learners themselves. Therefore, unlike the Dutch selective education, *Taman Siswa* schools offered an inclusive education, opening their doors to anyone regardless of their background, believing that everyone has a right to education.

Furthermore, *Taman Siswa* schools taught self-sufficiency to their students, and therefore students learned the importance of making a living. However, the schools did not reduce the purpose of education to economic gains. Thus, *Taman Siswa* schools encompassed both intrinsic and instrumental values of education and to a certain extent, the concept of *Bildung* through self-realisation, as discussed in the first section. However, the Dutch schools emphasised education's instrumental value; a Dutch education was an instrument to get a job.

The second main difference was the teaching methods. *Taman Siswa* schools emphasised student-centred methods where teaching practices were adjusted to the students' condition. The schools provided holistic learning where students could develop their thoughts through creative, innovative, independent learning, and be open to any ideas, yet guided by their own culture. Students used their senses and their surroundings to process information and develop their capabilities critically. These capabilities will prepare them to fulfil the needs of their body and soul. It will also help them prepare for life as they learned that their actions should bring goodness to society. Overall, these methods put more emphasis on the *educere* (lead out) purpose of learning. On the other hand, the Dutch schools were very much teacher-centred, where the teacher had all the knowledge. Teachers passed on their knowledge to their students through rote learning. This method emphasised the *educare* (preserve knowledge) purpose of learning.

A third difference was the curriculum. The Dutch schools followed the Western curriculum, and the language used in the schools were Dutch. The schools were indifferent to local culture. *Taman Siswa* schools, however, acknowledged the importance of local culture and incorporated this into their lessons. Lessons were taught in Javanese, and the local culture and local wisdom were important elements to learning in the schools. By engaging with local music, dance, and visual arts, students developed a sense of their own culture (McVey, 1967, p. 134).

A fourth major difference was funding. Since *Taman Siswa* schools used their curriculum and did not follow the Dutch colonial curriculum, the schools were considered to be "not

meeting the colonial government's standard". As a result, they did not receive any subsidy from the colonial government. This contrasted with Dutch Schools, which received colonial government funding. McVey (1967) argued that Taman Siswa purposely ran a self-sufficient institution so as not to adhere to the colonial government's agenda. In doing so it demonstrated the capacity of the local people to provide for themselves (p. 134).

When looking at these four differences, it can be argued that Dewantara had a progressive way of looking at the purpose of education. He was able to build a modern system ahead of his time. While other thinkers influenced him, he made the system unique to Indonesia by incorporating the local culture and local knowledge. When Indonesia proclaimed its independence from the Dutch in 1945, Dewantara was appointed as the first Minister of Education. His concept of *tut wuri handayani* was included in the Ministry's logo, which is still used up to the present day. While many of his views were not reflected in the education system of the independent Indonesian state, the Indonesian government has recently re-introduced two of the education concepts proposed by Dewantara: "*Pendidikan karakter*" (character education) and "*merdeka belajar*" (independent learning).

Education in Present-Day Indonesia

In looking at education in present-day Indonesia, we need to start with the 2003 Law no.20 on the National Education System. This act sets out the foundation of education in the country. In article 1, part 1, education is defined as a "*conscious and well-planned effort in creating a learning environment and learning process so that learners will be able to develop their full potential for acquiring spiritual and religious strengths, develop self-control, personality, intelligence, morals and a noble character and skills that one needs for him/herself, for the community, for the nation, and the country.*" From this definition, we can see that the country (at least rhetorically) first emphasises spiritual learning, followed by the intrinsic value of education, and only then the instrumental value of education. The combination of spiritual and practical (physical needs) resonates with Dewantara's concept of fulfilling both body and soul's needs.

This definition of education, which includes spiritual education, is arguably one reason why religion is taught in all schools in Indonesia, including non-religious schools. Students learn about their religion from primary school until they finish secondary school. However, students only learn about their own religion. Thus, during religion class, students go to their respective religion sessions. We can criticise this practice for focusing on exclusivity; learning one religion only. Such a practice can create a more segregated society as a result of students knowing very little about other religions. One might argue that students should learn all religions to build a sense of understanding of other religions. Currently, the seven government approved religions are taught in civics class in schools in Indonesia. However, the lessons only touch the surface, such as learning about the other religions' holy book, their places of worship, and their religious celebrations.

The definition of education also mentions the importance of building moral character. In 2010, the then Minister of Education, Mohammad Nuh (2009–2014), suggested an education curriculum based on character building (known as the 2013 curriculum). Teaching good character should go hand in hand with conveying subject knowledge. For example, when doing

a science experiment, teachers allow their students to fail and continue to re-do their experiments until they get it right. By doing so, not only do they teach the knowledge but also the value of persistence and honesty. Instead of manipulating data or cheating to get the correct result, students are taught that it is acceptable to make a mistake and the importance of never giving up (Putra, 2007). This character-building curriculum is in line with Dewantara's aforementioned concepts of *tri ngo* and *budi pekerti*.

Character education is one of the priorities for the Indonesian government. During his first term as president (2015–2019), President Joko Widodo included character building in his nine strategic programmes, known as the *nawa cita* (nine aspirations). Programme number eight encouraged a character revolution by restructuring the national curriculum to emphasise civic and moral education, such as teaching Indonesian history and patriotism. The Ministry of Education (2010) identified 80 values associated with character building. These values are classified into five categories, which are character in relation to: 1) God, 2) Oneself, 3) Others, 4) The environment, and 5) Nationalism. This resonates with Dewantara's purpose of education, which is to achieve the perfection of human life by fulfilling both body and soul's needs. The teaching of nationalism also echoes Dewantara's belief that Indonesians should have a strong foundation of their own culture before critically accepting any assimilation of a new culture.

On paper, Indonesia's contemporary character-building curriculum seems to provide direction for teachers. However, in practice, the integration of character building in the curriculum is challenging to implement. One reason is that the Indonesian curriculum is burdened with too many modules to learn. Another is the role of an ongoing ranking process (Triatmanto, 2010). For example, secondary school students in Indonesia have to learn at least twelve modules per semester and pass a school exam or national exam for each of the modules in order to graduate. Furthermore, every semester, students are ranked based on their grades. Thus, students' primary objective is not to develop their character but rather to get good grades.

Similarly, many teachers do not see the importance of character education because it does not feature in the national examinations and it does not have any weight in deciding whether a student can graduate or not (Wahyu, 2011, p. 144). Here, the purpose of education is reduced to achieving good grades. Students and teachers focus on grades because of the nature of competition in contemporary society. The education system in Indonesia has been overshadowed by the need to compete globally, with the purpose of education tending to be reduced to creating high levels of "human capital". Thus, it can be argued that the traces of Dutch Colonial school (which emphasised human capital), can still be clearly seen in the present Indonesia.

This view has been further entrenched during President Joko Widodo's second term (2019 – present). This may have been influenced by the background of key policymakers. Both the president and the current Minister of Education, Nadiem Makarim are known for their entrepreneurial background. Joko Widodo built a successful furniture business. Harvard graduate Nadiem Makarim founded Gojek, the first Indonesian technology company to be a 'unicorn' company (valued over \$1 billion). Despite his lack of experience in the education sector, Nadiem explained that he understands what stands ahead of the Indonesian younger generation; the challenges in terms of employment. The president believes that his background in technology will help to bring innovations to Indonesian education (Yanuar, 2019).

While acknowledging the importance of moral education, both President Joko Widodo and Nadiem Makarim put more emphasis on the production of human capital. Both pushed for secondary and higher education curriculums that are tailored to follow the market demand. The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) proposed several education policies to support the President's strategic programme. These include the revitalisation of vocational schools to fulfil the demand for skilled workers and the proposal to teach computing technology and coding in schools. The MoEC also pushed for a "link and match" curriculum that both educators and practitioners create. In this curriculum, an internship is an essential part of education, and the main objective is to ensure that the graduates will be employed upon completing their education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020a). With these policies, the Indonesian government hopes to compete with other countries in the globalised knowledge economy.

Reducing the purpose of education to economic gain does not necessarily correlate with building a national identity, engaging with local culture, and promoting human flourishing as suggested by Dewantara. Instead, it focuses on how to compete globally. To a certain extent, parents see learning English as more important than learning local languages. Parents who can afford it prefer to send their children to international schools instead of a local school. This is because English is seen as a language that brings opportunities with a brighter future for their children. Diniyah's (2017) study shows that parents acknowledge the importance of learning English as early as possible to help them to achieve success (p. 33).

In practice, the government's approach to education has strongly emphasised the human capital perspective; it sees education as an investment that yields an economic gain. Once again, the purpose of education is reduced to its instrumental value, framed in terms of preparing for global competition, getting a better job and better income. If a century ago, such a reductive framework was applied by the Dutch colonial government, today it is done by the Indonesian state, supported by international institutions who continue to promote a neoliberal agenda. Thus, it can be argued that there are some traces of the approach of Dutch colonial schools in present-day Indonesia.

This way of looking at education is a backward step from Dewantara's approach. Currently, the instrumental value of education is heavily emphasised, and education is tailored to what the market needs. This market is shaped by global power structures. With this approach, Indonesia is likely to always follow the standards set by the global power instead of creating standards based on Indonesian values. As Dewantara suggested, there should be a balance between instrumental and intrinsic values of education. Education should aim to make a person whole, both body and soul. Education should encompass self-realisation, as suggested in the concept of *Bildung*, rather than merely following market demand. As mentioned before, according to Dewantara there are three centres of education which are family, school, and environment. Unfortunately, in the present Indonesian education, these three centres rarely appear to work together, with teachers having the sole burden of educating the students (Wijayanti, 2018, p. 90). Teachers still take the central role in the learning process.

Efforts to implement character education in Indonesia highlight the challenges of putting philosophical concepts into practice in schools. For the process to succeed, everyone needs to have the same understanding of what is the purpose of education. This includes the government, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders. This is not an easy task because each stakeholder will have their own interests to serve.

A recent MoEC's policy of *merdeka belajar* (independent learning) tries to involve various stakeholders. I see this policy as another attempt to draw on Dewantara's philosophy of education. To shape the *merdeka belajar* policy, Nadiem Makarim has been helped by, among others, the *Pusat Studi Pendidikan dan Kebijakan* (Center of Education Study and Policy) founded by Indonesian educator, Najelaa Shihab. Shihab has been voicing the need for independent learning, not only for students but also for teachers, since 2014 through her *Komunitas Guru Belajar* (Teachers Learning Community) (Shihab & Komunitas Guru Belajar, 2017).

The first change of MoEC's policy is the removal of national exams for all levels of education in Indonesia starting from 2021. The national exams will be replaced by the national assessment and character survey (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020b). The assessment and survey will be done not at the end of the academic year but in the middle of the academic year. The aim is to give a picture of the students' condition so that the teachers can help the students further improve their learning process. Unlike national exams, the assessment and survey are not to be used to determine enrolment for subsequent educational levels. The new policy stated that student enrolment would be based on their residential zone. The school in that zone will accept anyone from the same zone.

Other policy changes include increasing school operational assistance funds and the freedom given to schools to design their own teaching practices that suit their students. The government is now promoting the *sekolah penggerak* (activator school) programme where schools are encouraged to create a holistic environment for students to learn to become creative, independent individuals with critical thinking, good morals and a sense of nationalism, promoting unity at a national level but also globally. To build this holistic environment, school principals and teachers will work together with parents, local communities, and community leaders. This echoes Dewantara's *tri pusat Pendidikan* concept.

In addition, in 2020, the government started an *organisasi penggerak* (activator organisation) programme that provided financial support to selected local education organisations. These organisations provided teacher training and other education training programmes based on proven best practice and research (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021). However, this programme was met with opposition from various educational institutions as it was deemed to lack transparency. The government has since stopped the programme, though it has indicated that it may be offered again next year with better scrutiny.

The impact of the *merdeka belajar* programmes proposed by the government is yet to be seen as some of them only take place in 2021. However, it is clear that the government has made some moves towards a modern version of Dewantara's philosophy in present day schools in Indonesia. This shows that his philosophies are still very much relevant in today's society.

I believe that revisiting Dewantara's philosophy will help recalibrate Indonesia's approach to education, moving from a heavily instrumental approach to one that involves a more balanced combination of intrinsic and instrumental purposes. However, I also acknowledge that it is not an easy task to bring philosophical concepts of education into practice. This is because in order for the policy to work, all stakeholders need to be on the same page in defining the purpose of education.

Conclusion

In this article, I have considered education's purpose from the vantage point of three lenses: Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy of education as reflected in his *Taman Siswa* schools, Dutch colonial-era schools, and schooling in contemporary Indonesia. By doing so, I have identified the emphases of each respective educational system. Both the Dutch schools and contemporary Indonesian schools lean heavily towards the instrumental value of education, whereas Dewantara's purpose encompassed both intrinsic value, extrinsic value, and to a certain extent, the concept of *Bildung*. In this essay, I have also looked at Indonesia's current education system, which leans heavily towards the instrumental value of education. However, recent educational reforms have given a glimpse of hope that some of Dewantara's philosophy may be brought back into the present education system. I have argued that there is a need to revisit Dewantara's philosophy of education to help re-balance the purpose of educating young Indonesians. I firmly believe that Indonesia needs to look back at its history and use it to recreate its own identity. However, I also acknowledge that there are some practical challenges in implementing Dewantara's philosophy in Indonesian schools.

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