Tut Wuri Handayani and Educational Freedom in Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Wasita of 1936

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Abstract

Tut Wuri Handayani is frequently invoked as an emblem of Indonesian education, yet its historical significance extends beyond the familiar injunction to encourage learners from behind. This article examines the principle within Ki Hadjar Dewantara's intellectual development and the educational and cultural setting of Wasita in January–June 1936. Using historical heuristics, external and internal source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, it brings the periodical's surviving publication evidence into conversation with bibliographic documentation, Dewantara's collected writings, and scholarship on Taman Siswa. The analysis argues that Tut Wuri Handayani articulated a relationship between educational freedom and responsible authority: the pamong guided learners without substituting the teacher's will for their development. This relationship belonged to the wider Among system, in which cultural formation, moral responsibility, and national self-respect were mutually dependent. Wasita matters as an institutional setting through which these commitments could be communicated to educators, rather than simply as a repository of a founder's ideas. Its programmatic character also requires a distinction between educational prescription and documented classroom practice. The article contributes to the intellectual history of Indonesian education by situating a subsequently nationalized maxim within colonial inequalities, cultural negotiation, and the responsibilities of educational leadership. Its contribution is a contextual reconstruction of the principle's conceptual relationships, rather than a claim to establish its first formulation or measure its implementation.

Keywords: Ki Hadjar Dewantara; Tut Wuri Handayani; Wasita; Among system; Taman Siswa; Indonesian educational history

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Introduction

Educational freedom acquired a particular urgency in the colonial Netherlands Indies, where schooling offered access to new forms of knowledge while reproducing unequal relationships between rulers and ruled. The question was not merely whether indigenous children could enter a school. It also concerned the purposes of their education, the cultural authority of its curriculum, and the kind of person that schooling was expected to produce. Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational thought addressed this conjunction of institutional inequality and human development. His principle of Tut Wuri Handayani, understood here as guiding and encouraging learners from behind, made the relationship between teacher and learner central to the larger project of national education. The principle asserted that education should cultivate the learner's capacity to act responsibly, rather than make compliance the measure of educational success.[1]

Colonial schooling cannot be reduced to a single, unchanging mechanism. Its differentiated institutions, unequal routes of access, and administrative priorities nevertheless created conditions in which education could reinforce existing hierarchies. The Ethical Policy brought an official language of improvement, including educational provision, into colonial governance from the beginning of the twentieth century. Expansion did not remove the restrictions shaping indigenous access. Nor did it guarantee that the knowledge acquired in colonial schools would serve the aspirations of the populations receiving it. Scholarship on the period identifies this tension between enlarged educational opportunities and continuing colonial interests. It also shows why education could become a resource for criticism of the order that had helped make such opportunities possible.[2]

Dewantara's own trajectory gives this tension an individual and institutional history. Born Raden Mas Soewardi Soerjaningrat in Yogyakarta on 2 May 1889, he benefited from opportunities associated with his aristocratic background. His encounters with Western schooling, journalism, political activism, and exile brought him into sustained contact with the contradictions of colonial modernity. The establishment of Taman Siswa in Yogyakarta on 3 July 1922 gave organizational form to an alternative educational project. National education, in this setting, involved more than replacing colonial administrators with indigenous teachers. It required reconsidering the

[1] Alifia Nurhusna Afandi, Aprilia Iva Swastika, and Ervin Yunus Evendi, "Pendidikan pada Masa Pemerintah Kolonial di Hindia Belanda Tahun 1900–1930," *Jurnal Artefak* 7, no. 1 (2020): 21–30, https://doi.org/10.25157/ja.v7i1.3038; Habib Akbar Nurhakim and Fahruddin, "Sistem Pendidikan Hindia Belanda pada Masa Kebijakan Politik Etis," *Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah* 13, no. 1 (2024): 52–69, https://doi.org/10.21009/JPS.131.03; Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977).

[2] Muhammad Fakhriansyah and Intan Ranti Permatasari Patoni, "Akses Pendidikan bagi Pribumi pada Periode Etis (1901–1930)," *Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah* 8, no. 2 (2019): 122–47, https://doi.org/10.21009/JPS.082.03.

relationship between knowledge, cultural identity, moral formation, and the learner's freedom.[3]

Tut Wuri Handayani is therefore a historical problem as well as an educational maxim. Its familiarity can obscure the intellectual work performed by the principle within the Among system. What did freedom mean when education remained embedded in colonial institutions and social inequalities? How could a teacher guide without dominating? How did an educational project rooted in indigenous culture remain open to ideas circulating beyond the Indies? These questions situate the maxim within the history of authority and national self-formation. They also prevent its later prominence from determining in advance what the principle must have meant to educators in the 1930s.

The periodical Wasita provides a focused setting for pursuing these questions. The six issues considered here belong to Tahun II, numbers 1–6, dated January through June 1936. Their publication identity links cultural discussion with an audience of teachers and people responsible for children's education. The publishing institution was the Cultureel Nationaal Instituut Wasita in Mataram–Jogjakarta, and the named publishing council included Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Soewandhie, and Ki Ngoesmanadji. The periodical thus places Dewantara's educational commitments within an organized medium of communication. Its significance lies in the connection between thought, publication, and the people expected to carry educational principles into everyday relationships.[4]

Existing scholarship establishes several indispensable points of departure. Kenji Tsuchiya locates Taman Siswa within the historical relationship between leadership and democratic aspirations. Bartolomeus Samho and Oscar Yasunari examine the conceptual foundations of Dewantara's education and the difficulties of implementation. Siti Malikhah Towaf addresses culture-based education and learning, while I Gusti Agung Made Gede Mudana considers character formation through Dewantara's educational philosophy. These studies make clear that freedom, culture, and responsibility cannot be treated as independent components of his thought. They also provide a basis for asking how particular publications situated such commitments within the movement's intellectual life.[5]

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[3] Kenji Tsuchiya, *Democracy and Leadership: The Rise of the Taman Siswa Movement in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987).

[4] *Wasita: Madjalah Keboedajaan Oemoem*, Tahun II, nos. 1–6 (January–June 1936), Cultureel Nationaal Instituut Wasita, Mataram–Jogjakarta; Koleksi Tempo Doeloe, "Madjalah Keboedajaan Oemoem 'Wasita', dengan Madjelis Penerbit Ki Hadjar Dewantara, edisi No.1 Djanoeari 1936 s/d No.6 Juni 1936," July 19, 2010, https://koleksitempodoeloe.blogspot.com/2010/07/madjalah-keboedajaan-oemoem-wasita.html. The publication identity and reproduced covers are documented in the collection description; content attribution requires separate article-level evidence.

[5] Kenji Tsuchiya, *Democracy and Leadership: The Rise of the Taman Siswa Movement in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987); Bartolomeus Samho and Oscar Yasunari, *Konsep Pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara dan Tantangan-Tantangan Implementasinya di Indonesia Dewasa Ini* (Bandung: Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, 2010); Siti Malikhah Towaf, "The National Heritage of Ki Hadjar Dewantara in Tamansiswa about Culture-Based Education

Dorothy Ferary's comparative analysis connects Dewantara's educational philosophy with colonial schooling and later Indonesian educational purposes. Mora Claramita reads Tut Wuri Handayani alongside contemporary approaches to learning. Arif Perwira Dhani and Daya Negri Wijaya reconstruct educational freedom across the period 1922–1942. Each approach illuminates the historical reach of Dewantara's ideas, but each operates at a different analytical scale from a study centered on a particular periodical and a six-month corpus. Their findings should be used as interlocutors, rather than as substitutes for the evidence of publication in 1936.[6]

An important qualification concerns the research gap. It would be inaccurate to suggest that previous work has ignored Wasita altogether. Ita Chorizannah's study investigates its educational and cultural ideas in 1928–1931, drawing on periodical sources. The gap addressed here is consequently narrower: the relationship between Tut Wuri Handayani, educational freedom, and cultural authority in the setting of the 1936 issues. The earlier study supplies historical background, but cannot by itself establish what appeared in a later issue. The existence of both bodies of publication evidence also requires caution before presenting Wasita's institutional history as a seamless, unaltered sequence.[7]

This article aims to reconstruct Dewantara's intellectual formation and explain the place of Tut Wuri Handayani within the educational relationships associated with Wasita in 1936. Its central argument is that the maxim formulated responsible guidance within a cultural and national project of human emancipation. The teacher's position behind the learner expressed an ethical limit on educational power, while retaining obligations of care, example, and intervention. The contribution is to bring these relationships into one historically bounded explanation. Its novelty rests on the interpretive connection between the maxim, the periodical's institutional setting, and the colonial problem of educational authority; it does not depend on declaring the maxim unprecedented or claiming that its publication immediately transformed educational practice.

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and Learning," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7, no. 23 (2016): 167–76, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1112759.pdf; I Gusti Agung Made Gede Mudana, "Membangun Karakter dalam Perspektif Filsafat Pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara," *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia* 2, no. 2 (2019): 75–81, https://doi.org/10.23887/jfi.v2i2.21285.

[6] Dorothy Ferary, "On Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Philosophy of Education," *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education* 5, no. 2 (2021): 65–78, https://doi.org/10.7577/njcie.4156; Mora Claramita, "Revealing 'Tut Wuri Handayani'—A Student-Centred Learning Approach—by Ki Hajar Dewantara from the Early 20th Century: A Literature Review," *Jurnal Pendidikan Kedokteran Indonesia* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.22146/jpki.25295; Arif Perwira Dhani and Daya Negri Wijaya, "Sejarah Pemikiran Pendidikan Merdeka Ki Hajar Dewantara Tahun 1922–1942," *Jurnal Integrasi dan Harmoni Inovatif Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 4, no. 6 (2024), https://doi.org/10.17977/um063v4i6p9.

[7] Ita Chorizannah, *Gagasan Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan dalam Majalah Wasita (1928–1931)* (Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, 2016), https://eprints.uny.ac.id/39548/.

Method

The investigation uses the historical method through heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Its principal orientation is intellectual history: educational concepts are examined as responses to historically situated problems, rather than treated as timeless propositions. The chronological focus is January–June 1936, with earlier events included only to explain Dewantara's intellectual formation and the institutional circumstances of Taman Siswa. Later scholarship assists contextualization and interpretation.[8]

Heuristics establishes the corpus and differentiates the functions of its sources. The principal periodical corpus comprises Wasita, Tahun II, numbers 1–6. Publication images and descriptions establish issue dates, institutional identity, and the intended readership. The Indeks Beranotasi Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara provides article-level bibliographic leads, while Dewantara's collected educational and cultural writings supply a wider conceptual frame. Scholarship on colonial education and Taman Siswa is used to assess context and compare interpretations. A later catalogue or collected edition is not treated as equivalent to the complete contemporaneous issue: each provides access to a different layer of evidence.[9]

External criticism examines titles, serial numbering, issue dates, named institutions, and the relationship between reproduced material and its provenance. A commercial collection description supports the identification of photographed issues, but does not independently certify the completeness of their contents. Similarly, an archival institution's possession of relevant material does not establish that every item in its holdings has been examined. The distinction matters particularly for April 1936, whose place in the six-issue sequence is documented by publication evidence without warranting a claim that its full text has been verified against every bibliographic entry. The analysis uses bibliographic identification without converting it into an assertion of unrestricted archival access.[10]

Internal criticism asks what the sources were designed to accomplish. Wasita's association with Dewantara and the educational milieu of Taman Siswa makes it valuable evidence of a program of national education. That association also means that its

[8] Helius Sjamsuddin, *Metodologi Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2012), 11–13; Sulasman, *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah: Teori, Metode, Contoh Aplikasi* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2014), 74–86.

[9] Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, *Indeks Beranotasi Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara* (Jakarta: Direktorat Sejarah, 2017); Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977); Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Kedua: Kebudayaan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977).

[10] Koleksi Tempo Doeloe, "Madjalah Keboedajaan Oemoem 'Wasita', dengan Madjelis Penerbit Ki Hadjar Dewantara, edisi No.1 Djanoeari 1936 s/d No.6 Juni 1936," July 19, 2010, https://koleksitempodoeloe.blogspot.com/2010/07/madjalah-keboedajaan-oemoem-wasita.html; Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, *Indeks Beranotasi Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara* (Jakarta: Direktorat Sejarah, 2017). The collection description documents the issue sequence. It does not establish direct examination of complete originals.

statements cannot be read as neutral descriptions of schooling. Prescriptions about freedom, guidance, and cultural formation reveal educational purposes; they do not automatically establish the conduct of teachers or the experiences of pupils. Agreement with collected writings supports conceptual comparison, but consistency alone cannot demonstrate that practice matched principle. Particular authorship is distinguished from editorial leadership, and an attribution to Dewantara is made only where the bibliographic record supports it.

Interpretation proceeds through analysis and synthesis. Analysis separates the meanings of kemerdekaan, pamong, kodrat alam, kodrat zaman, and Tut Wuri Handayani. Synthesis reconnects these concepts with the colonial setting, Dewantara's intellectual trajectory, and the movement's educational commitments. R. G. Collingwood's account of historical understanding provides a basis for asking what problems an actor sought to address through thought. It is used as an interpretive orientation, not as a claim that the historian can recover every intention behind a text. Uncertainty is retained where the available evidence does not resolve a question.[11]

Historiography combines a chronological account of intellectual formation with thematic analysis of educational freedom and authority. It distinguishes publication history, conceptual interpretation, and later educational significance. The evidence is documentary; the analysis does not use oral testimony. Where article titles or content indications are available through the annotated index rather than a complete original text, the relevant notes identify that mediation. This procedure limits the claims that can be made while preserving the distinction between historical evidence and historical inference.

Results

Colonial schooling and the formation of an educational critic

Dewantara's early education placed him inside institutions whose opportunities were unevenly distributed. His family connections in the Pakualaman milieu enabled access to a Dutch-language education at the Europeesche Lagere School. He subsequently attended STOVIA in Batavia, although he did not complete his medical studies. These experiences mattered because they made Western education both a source of intellectual resources and an object of criticism. Language skills and familiarity with modern schooling could assist public intervention, even as the unequal distribution of those resources revealed the limits of the colonial educational order.[12]

The historical relationship between schooling and criticism was therefore more complicated than a division between foreign knowledge and indigenous resistance.

[11] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), "Epilegomena.".

[12] Darsiti Soeratman, *Ki Hajar Dewantara* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, 1989); Suhartono Wiryopranoto, Nina Herlina, Djoko Marihandono, and Yudha B. Tangkilisan, *Ki Hajar Dewantara: Pemikiran dan Perjuangannya* (Jakarta: Museum Kebangkitan Nasional, 2017), https://repositori.kemendikdasmen.go.id/4881/.

Dewantara used abilities acquired through colonial educational opportunities to challenge colonial priorities. His trajectory illustrates the capacity of educated indigenous actors to redirect knowledge toward purposes not intended by the authorities organizing its distribution. This does not make unequal access less significant. It shows how that inequality could become visible to people who had gained entry into privileged institutions and subsequently questioned the political and social conditions surrounding them.

Journalism extended the sphere of that criticism. Dewantara contributed to publications including Sedyotomo, De Express, Oetoesan Hindia, Kaoem Moeda, and Midden Java. The newspaper offered a means of addressing public questions beyond the schoolroom, connecting political argument with an educational ambition to form judgment. His participation in nationalist activity, including the Indische Partij with Ernest Douwes Dekker and Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, placed writing within organized opposition to colonial rule. The journalist and the educator were connected by a concern with the conditions under which people could recognize injustice and develop the capacity to respond.[13]

The dispute surrounding his 1913 criticism of Dutch independence celebrations intensified this connection. Dewantara challenged the moral contradiction of expecting colonized people to participate in celebrating the colonizer's freedom. The episode contributed to his exile in the Netherlands alongside Douwes Dekker and Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo. Its importance for the present argument is not that one political controversy mechanically produced an educational doctrine. Rather, it exposed a contradiction that later educational thought also addressed: an authority claiming legitimate leadership while limiting the freedom of those subject to it.[14]

Exile and the selective appropriation of educational ideas

Exile expanded the intellectual setting in which Dewantara considered education. Encounters with European educational discussions and access to a wider range of writing helped him reassess the relationship between learning, development, and freedom. His later educational synthesis drew on ideas associated with Friedrich Fröbel, Maria Montessori, and Rabindranath Tagore. The significance of these connections lies in the willingness to learn across cultural boundaries while questioning whether a borrowed model could be transferred without adaptation. Dewantara's critique of colonial

[13] Darsiti Soeratman, *Ki Hajar Dewantara* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, 1989); Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[14] Darsiti Soeratman, *Ki Hajar Dewantara* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, 1989); Kenji Tsuchiya, *Democracy and Leadership: The Rise of the Taman Siswa Movement in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987).

schooling did not require rejection of every idea associated with Europe or the wider world.[15]

The distinctions among these influences are important. Fröbel's attention to children's development and creative activity, Montessori's emphasis on conditions supporting independent growth, and Tagore's concern with cultural life offered resources for different aspects of the educational problem. Their presence in Dewantara's intellectual horizon does not establish a simple genealogy in which each element of the Among system can be assigned to an external origin. It indicates an engagement with educational possibilities that had to be reconsidered within the social and cultural circumstances of the Indies. Historical interpretation should therefore follow adaptation as well as influence.

This selective engagement helps explain why cultural rootedness and educational openness could coexist. Dewantara's educational project required a community to exercise judgment about what it accepted from elsewhere. Cultural identity was not an argument for intellectual isolation; it was a basis for assessing the purposes that imported knowledge would serve. In this respect, the educational response to colonial domination involved reclaiming the authority to evaluate and adapt. The desired learner was neither a passive recipient of foreign instruction nor an individual detached from collective life, but someone capable of developing within a culture while responding to change.

The movement toward educational institution-building continued the national purpose of Dewantara's political activity through a different strategy. Education addressed the formation of people over time, including capacities that could not be secured simply by changing administrative arrangements. This transition should not be narrated as a complete withdrawal from politics. Questions about the ownership of institutions, the legitimacy of cultural knowledge, and the moral purpose of schooling remained political in a colonial society. Educational work made those questions durable by locating them within the relationships through which children learned to understand themselves and their communities.

Taman Siswa and the institutional conditions of freedom

Founded in Yogyakarta on 3 July 1922, Taman Siswa gave material and organizational form to Dewantara's educational commitments. It challenged an educational order in which social position and colonial classification helped determine access and expectations. Its alternative was national education grounded in cultural life and directed toward the formation of manusia merdeka, or persons able to live freely and responsibly. Such formation joined intellectual development with moral and social capacities. The institution's significance cannot consequently be measured only by its

[15] Dorothy Ferary, "On Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Philosophy of Education," *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education* 5, no. 2 (2021): 65–78, https://doi.org/10.7577/njcie.4156; Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977).

existence outside government schooling; it also lay in the different purposes attached to educational relationships.[16]

The Among system supplied a vocabulary for those relationships. Among draws on the Javanese language of nurturing and guidance associated with momong or ngemong. The teacher as pamong was responsible for care, example, and the conditions of development. Education was understood as tuntunan, a process of guidance that worked with the child's capacities rather than substituting an adult's intentions for them. This conception gave educational freedom an institutional setting. Freedom was not left to the learner to create alone: it depended on the conduct of adults and on an environment capable of supporting growth.[17]

The movement's expansion during the 1920s and 1930s also raised a problem of communication. Shared principles had to reach educators operating in different settings. A school network required ways of relating the founder's concepts to the responsibilities of those who enacted them. Publications could help articulate a common language of education, explain institutional commitments, and sustain discussion among teachers. The significance of Wasita belongs to this problem. A periodical could mediate between an educational philosophy and a dispersed community without guaranteeing that all readers understood or implemented the philosophy identically.

Colonial regulation made institutional autonomy a contested issue. The 1932 Wild Schools Ordinance confronted non-government educational initiatives with restrictions that Taman Siswa opposed. The dispute exposed the relationship between educational freedom and the authority to organize schooling. Within this setting, the learner's independence and the institution's independence were connected, although they were not the same. A school could resist colonial control while still needing to examine its own exercise of power over pupils. Reading the movement's educational language against this distinction gives the problem of authority a sharper historical form.[18]

Wasita as a medium of educational and cultural argument

The surviving publication evidence identifies the 1936 Wasita series as a monthly periodical directed toward teachers, instructors, and those responsible for children. The title Madjalah Keboedajaan Oemoem placed culture prominently within its public identity, while its description emphasized education. Dewantara's named leadership and

[16] Kenji Tsuchiya, *Democracy and Leadership: The Rise of the Taman Siswa Movement in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987); Bartolomeus Samho and Oscar Yasunari, *Konsep Pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara dan Tantangan-Tantangan Implementasinya di Indonesia Dewasa Ini* (Bandung: Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, 2010).

[17] Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977); Bartolomeus Samho and Oscar Yasunari, *Konsep Pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara dan Tantangan-Tantangan Implementasinya di Indonesia Dewasa Ini* (Bandung: Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, 2010).

[18] Kenji Tsuchiya, *Democracy and Leadership: The Rise of the Taman Siswa Movement in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987).

the participation of Soewandhie and Ki Ngoesmanadji in the publishing council connected this intellectual work to identifiable actors. The material presented Wasita as an organized site of communication, rather than an incidental outlet for separate educational reflections.[19]

Its relationship with the history of the earlier Wasita requires temporal care. Chorizannah establishes that the periodical appearing from 1928 discussed education, culture, language, and women's education. Her account also records a change in its management in 1931, alongside the emergence of Poesara in Yogyakarta. The earlier publication history demonstrates an existing tradition of educational print, but does not permit every feature of the 1928–1931 period to be projected onto the 1936 series. Continuity here concerns a field of educational and cultural argument whose institutional arrangements must be identified for the period under examination.[20]

The annotated index gives more specific indications of the concerns associated with Dewantara's 1936 contributions. January entries include a discussion of custom and responses connected with debate about national education. February entries address cultural relationships with people abroad and the meaning of culture. The March record includes instruction concerning Javanese musical knowledge. For May, the index identifies a discussion of Javanese and Islamic calendrical differences; for June, it records a contribution on Javanese as a language of instruction. These records corroborate the breadth of the educational and cultural setting without supplying the complete argument of each original article.[21]

The distribution of subjects is historically suggestive, but should not be made to prove more than it records. Questions of custom, language, music, and cultural exchange show that the intellectual field surrounding education included more than classroom technique. They provide a context in which national education could be discussed through relationships between knowledge, sensibility, and collective life. They do not, by themselves, demonstrate that every issue explicitly formulated Tut Wuri Handayani or that the maxim changed meaning month by month. The analytical claim concerns the conceptual setting of the principle, not an unsupported serial chronology of its formulation.

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[19] *Wasita: Madjalah Keboedajaan Oemoem*, Tahun II, nos. 1–6 (January–June 1936), Cultureel Nationaal Instituut Wasita, Mataram–Jogjakarta; Koleksi Tempo Doeloe, "Madjalah Keboedajaan Oemoem 'Wasita', dengan Madjelis Penerbit Ki Hadjar Dewantara, edisi No.1 Djanoeari 1936 s/d No.6 Juni 1936," July 19, 2010, https://koleksitempodoeloe.blogspot.com/2010/07/madjalah-keboedajaan-oemoem-wasita.html. The periodical names Dewantara as leader and Soewandhie and Ki Ngoesmanadji as members of its publishing council.

[20] Ita Chorizannah, *Gagasan Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan dalam Majalah Wasita (1928–1931)* (Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, 2016), https://eprints.uny.ac.id/39548/.

[21] Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, *Indeks Beranotasi Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara* (Jakarta: Direktorat Sejarah, 2017), 54–58, entries 126–132, 136, and 138. These are bibliographic descriptions of Wasita contributions, not a substitute for the complete article texts.

Wasita's intended readership further clarifies the role of publication. Addressing educators meant addressing people whose decisions could shape the everyday experience of learning. The periodical's intellectual work could connect cultural questions with the responsibilities of guidance. That connection was a proposed relationship between writing and educational conduct, rather than evidence of a measured effect. The surviving record establishes an audience sought by the publication; it does not establish circulation figures, the social composition of actual readers, or the extent of adoption across Taman Siswa branches. These distinctions preserve the importance of print while avoiding an inflated account of its reach.

Tut Wuri Handayani within the Among system

Tut Wuri Handayani acquires its full meaning through the Among system. The teacher's position behind the learner indicates a form of guidance that encourages initiative while maintaining care. It does not reduce education to the passive observation of whatever a child chooses to do. The pamong remains responsible for an environment in which development is possible, for attention to difficulty, and for the ethical direction of educational relationships. The principle therefore shifts the purpose of authority: the educator's power should assist the learner's growing capacity to act, rather than continually demonstrate the adult's capacity to command.[22]

This relationship rests on a particular conception of the child. Educational guidance must recognize differences in capacities, needs, and circumstances. The terms kodrat alam and kodrat zaman express the importance of natural conditions and historical time in development. Education cannot assume that every learner will grow through the same form of instruction, nor can it disregard the world in which learning occurs. The terms are not used here as modern psychological measurements. Their historical function is to limit arbitrary educational intervention by placing development within conditions that the teacher must understand.[23]

The principle also belongs within the leadership trilogy. Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha locates the educator in front as an example; Ing Madya Mangun Karsa places the educator among learners to foster initiative; Tut Wuri Handayani places the educator behind to offer support. These positions describe responsibilities that can vary with educational circumstances. They are not a fixed progression that every lesson or every learner must follow. Taken together, they indicate that the teacher's location and conduct should

[22] Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977); Bartolomeus Samho and Oscar Yasunari, *Konsep Pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara dan Tantangan-Tantangan Implementasinya di Indonesia Dewasa Ini* (Bandung: Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, 2010).

[23] Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977).

answer the needs of development. Authority becomes a practical question of when to exemplify, when to participate, and when to allow greater independence.[24]

The relationship among the three principles prevents a misleading separation of encouragement from example and collective activity. A teacher who always withdraws cannot necessarily fulfill the obligation to guide. Conversely, a teacher who always occupies the front may prevent pupils from exercising the capacities education claims to cultivate. The historical significance of Tut Wuri Handayani is therefore relational. Its place in the trilogy makes room for learner initiative while retaining a framework of responsibility. The teacher's restraint becomes a positive educational action when it enables growth, rather than an abandonment of educational duty.

Freedom and the formation of responsible persons

Kemerdekaan in Dewantara's educational thought concerns the formation of people able to think, judge, and act with responsibility. It includes freedom from unnecessary compulsion, but also the ability to direct oneself. The distinction is essential to the meaning of manusia merdeka. A learner who depends wholly on external command has not achieved the independence that the educational project seeks. A learner who acts without regard for others has not achieved its moral purpose. Freedom and responsibility are thus linked through education as a process of forming judgment.[25]

The balance between cipta, rasa, and karsa gives this argument a fuller account of personhood. Intellectual capacity, affective and moral sensibility, and the will to act are understood as interdependent. Knowledge matters, but its educational value depends also on the uses to which it is put and the relationships it sustains. Budi pekerti accordingly involves more than memorizing rules of proper conduct. It concerns the formation of dispositions through which thought, feeling, and action can support a responsible life. The pamong's example and the learner's experience are important because conduct cannot be formed through instruction alone.[26]

The social location of education extends these responsibilities beyond the classroom. The framework of three educational centers—family, school, and society—recognizes that children develop through relationships that no school entirely controls. Values learned through instruction can be reinforced or unsettled elsewhere. The teacher's task therefore belongs to a wider field of upbringing and collective life. This

[24] Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977).

[25] Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977); Bartolomeus Samho and Oscar Yasunari, *Konsep Pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara dan Tantangan-Tantangan Implementasinya di Indonesia Dewasa Ini* (Bandung: Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, 2010).

[26] Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977); I Gusti Agung Made Gede Mudana, "Membangun Karakter dalam Perspektif Filsafat Pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara," *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia* 2, no. 2 (2019): 75–81, https://doi.org/10.23887/jfi.v2i2.21285.

conception provides a setting for Tut Wuri Handayani as sustained guidance, rather than a technique restricted to one instructional encounter. It also helps explain why cultural and social questions remained pertinent to educational discussion.[27]

Culture as the setting and purpose of education

Culture supplies both the conditions of education and part of its purpose. Dewantara's national education sought to cultivate people who could participate in their society without losing the capacity to respond to the changing world. Cultural formation was consequently more than the retention of particular customs. Language, artistic expression, moral sensibility, and social relationships belonged to the processes through which learners acquired a place in collective life. Education could reproduce these processes while also giving learners the capacity to assess and develop them.[28]

The concepts of continuity, convergence, and concentricity, commonly described as Tri-Kon, express this balance in Dewantara's wider cultural thought. Continuity concerns connection with inherited life; convergence allows engagement with other cultural worlds; concentricity preserves a community's capacity to retain its own orientation within such engagement. They explain how educational freedom could be associated with cultural rootedness without requiring isolation. Their analytical use here clarifies the wider philosophy; it does not establish, without an identifiable text, that each term received an explicit formulation in every Wasita issue of 1936.[29]

Read together, these findings place Tut Wuri Handayani within a coherent educational relationship. The learner develops through guidance that recognizes natural capacities and historical circumstances. Moral formation makes independence compatible with shared life. Cultural formation connects personal development with a national project under colonial conditions. Wasita's relevance lies in the periodical setting through which educators could encounter arguments about these relationships. The evidence supports the principle's place in a wider philosophy of education, while leaving the extent of its practical implementation as a separate historical question.

[27] Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977); Siti Malikhah Towaf, "The National Heritage of Ki Hadjar Dewantara in Tamansiswa about Culture-Based Education and Learning," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7, no. 23 (2016): 167–76, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1112759.pdf.

[28] Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Kedua: Kebudayaan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977); Siti Malikhah Towaf, "The National Heritage of Ki Hadjar Dewantara in Tamansiswa about Culture-Based Education and Learning," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7, no. 23 (2016): 167–76, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1112759.pdf.

[29] Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Kedua: Kebudayaan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977); I Gusti Agung Made Gede Mudana, "Membangun Karakter dalam Perspektif Filsafat Pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara," *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia* 2, no. 2 (2019): 75–81, https://doi.org/10.23887/jfi.v2i2.21285.

Discussion

Educational freedom and the problem of legitimate authority

The findings explain why Tut Wuri Handayani should be read as a proposition about educational power. Dewantara did not remove the teacher from the educational relationship. He reconsidered the grounds on which the teacher could legitimately act. Authority was justified through responsibility for growth, rather than through an assumption that the adult's will must prevail. This position connects the intimate setting of guidance with a larger colonial problem: education could serve an administrative order or help people acquire the capacities to judge and act within their own lives. The distinction concerns purposes and relationships, not only institutional ownership.[30]

This reading retains the emancipatory character of Dewantara's thought while resisting an idealized opposition between uniformly coercive colonial schools and uniformly liberating national schools. Colonial schooling helped reproduce hierarchy, but also gave some indigenous actors resources with which to challenge it. Taman Siswa articulated different purposes, yet its prescriptions alone cannot establish an absence of hierarchy in every educational encounter. A historical analysis gains precision by asking how institutions sought to justify authority and what evidence would be needed to examine that authority in practice. The critique of domination remains central without becoming a claim that all contradictions had been resolved.

The language of nurturing also carries a productive tension. Pamong suggests care and protection, but care can itself become an unequal relationship if the educator decides every aspect of development. Tut Wuri Handayani places a limit within that relationship by requiring room for the learner's initiative. It does not eliminate the need for judgment about when support becomes direction or when restraint becomes neglect. This tension is part of the historical meaning of the principle. It explains why responsible authority, rather than the mere absence of authority, is the article's central analytical formulation.

Freedom in this framework is socially situated. Dewantara's manusia merdeka is formed through relationships with family, school, society, and culture. Independence does not require separation from those relationships; it concerns the capacity to participate in them without complete dependence on command. Such a conception challenges readings that equate educational freedom solely with individual choice. It also cautions against treating collective responsibility as automatic submission. The difficult educational task is to cultivate judgment through which personal development and obligations to others can coexist, a task that the Among system presents as an enduring responsibility of the educator.

[30] Kenji Tsuchiya, *Democracy and Leadership: The Rise of the Taman Siswa Movement in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987); Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977).

Cultural negotiation and the agency of the colonized educator

Dewantara's engagement with ideas associated with Fröbel, Montessori, and Tagore complicates accounts of national education as a simple return to an untouched indigenous tradition. His educational agency lay partly in selection, comparison, and adaptation. The relevant historical opposition was not between all foreign ideas and all local practices. It concerned who could decide which knowledge was valuable and how that knowledge would be used. The ability to assess educational ideas from elsewhere was itself part of the freedom sought by a national educational project.[31]

Culture similarly appears as a field of active formation. A school rooted in cultural life need not reproduce every inherited practice without criticism. The relationship between continuity and change gives education a responsibility to maintain connections while enabling development. This reading preserves the humanistic emphasis of the research: learners are neither administrative resources nor passive bearers of tradition. They participate in the ongoing life of a community. The importance of languages, sensibility, and social conduct within the educational framework follows from that understanding of culture as lived relationship.

The question of scale remains significant. Dewantara's vocabulary drew on Javanese cultural experience while claiming a wider national purpose. Those scales should not be treated as automatically identical. The national project required educational ideas formed in particular settings to address a broader community. Wasita's cultural discussions belong to that process of articulation. The evidence available here establishes a relationship between situated concepts and national ambitions, but does not measure how different communities received that relationship. Recognizing this limit makes the account more historically accountable without dismissing the national significance of the project.

Print as an institutional setting of intellectual history

Attention to Wasita changes the unit of analysis. A familiar maxim can be studied as part of a founder's philosophy, but publication places it within relationships involving institutions, editors, readers, and educational responsibilities. The periodical's named leadership and intended audience reveal that ideas were presented through an organized form. This does not require a claim that print directly caused pedagogical change. It identifies the institutional setting in which educational commitments could be articulated, shared, and connected with the work of teachers.[32]

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[31] Dorothy Ferary, "On Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Philosophy of Education," *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education* 5, no. 2 (2021): 65–78, https://doi.org/10.7577/njcie.4156; Ki Hadjar Dewantara, *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Kedua: Kebudayaan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Tamansiswa, 1977).

[32] *Wasita: Madjalah Keboedajaan Oemoem*, Tahun II, nos. 1–6 (January–June 1936), Cultureel Nationaal Instituut Wasita, Mataram–Jogjakarta; Koleksi Tempo Doeloe, "Madjalah Keboedajaan Oemoem 'Wasita', dengan Madjelis Penerbit Ki Hadjar Dewantara, edisi No.1 Djanoeari 1936 s/d No.6 Juni 1936,"

The distinction between a periodical and a later collected edition is consequently substantive. A collection may stabilize an author's reputation and make writings accessible under thematic headings. A periodical situates publication within a dated sequence, an editorial arrangement, and an audience addressed at the time. Both are valuable, but they answer different historical questions. Reading the wider conceptual relationships through collected writings while retaining Wasita's publication setting avoids replacing the circumstances of 1936 with an apparently timeless educational system. It also prevents later prominence from becoming evidence of original reception.

This argument must remain proportionate to the available source access. Reproduced covers demonstrate publication identity; bibliographic entries identify contributions; complete articles would support close textual analysis. These evidentiary levels are connected but not interchangeable. The six-month corpus establishes the bounds of inquiry, rather than a claim that six fully available texts show identical content. Nor can a bibliography establish a particular sentence's first appearance. The historical contribution of the periodical perspective is strongest when the route from evidence to interpretation remains visible and the scope of each conclusion matches its source.

Historiographical position and the limits of contemporary analogy

The analysis extends rather than displaces existing scholarship. Tsuchiya's attention to democracy and leadership helps situate the problem of authority institutionally. Samho and Yasunari supply a conceptual account and an awareness of implementation difficulties. Towaf and Mudana clarify the connections between cultural and moral formation. The periodical focus brings these strands into a narrower discussion of educational freedom in 1936. It also revises an excessively broad research-gap claim: the contribution is not the discovery that Dewantara had educational ideas or that Wasita contained them, but an explanation of how their relationships can be understood historically.[33]

Comparison with learner-centered education is useful when it clarifies features such as initiative, guidance, and attention to development. Claramita's analysis provides a substantial precedent for that comparison. Yet a historian should not use similarity to turn Dewantara into the inevitable precursor of every contemporary learning model. Nor should the presence of recognizable features imply that a modern conceptual vocabulary

July 19, 2010, https://koleksitempodoeloe.blogspot.com/2010/07/madjalah-keboedajaan-oemoem-wasita.html.

[33] Kenji Tsuchiya, *Democracy and Leadership: The Rise of the Taman Siswa Movement in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987); Bartolomeus Samho and Oscar Yasunari, *Konsep Pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara dan Tantangan-Tantangan Implementasinya di Indonesia Dewasa Ini* (Bandung: Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, 2010); Siti Malikhah Towaf, "The National Heritage of Ki Hadjar Dewantara in Tamansiswa about Culture-Based Education and Learning," *Journal of Education and Practice* 7, no. 23 (2016): 167–76, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1112759.pdf; I Gusti Agung Made Gede Mudana, "Membangun Karakter dalam Perspektif Filsafat Pendidikan Ki Hadjar Dewantara," *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia* 2, no. 2 (2019): 75–81, https://doi.org/10.23887/jfi.v2i2.21285.

was already fully articulated in the same form. Tut Wuri Handayani belongs to a historically particular constellation of national education, cultural life, and the pamong's responsibilities. Contemporary terminology illuminates only part of that constellation.[34]

Ferary's comparison of educational purposes across colonial and later Indonesian settings similarly makes the continuing significance of Dewantara's philosophy intelligible without proving unbroken implementation. The distinction between continuity of a stated ideal and continuity of institutional practice is essential. A principle may retain symbolic force while being interpreted differently under new conditions. Conversely, a later educational practice may resemble Dewantara's aims without a documented line of direct influence. The present findings concern conceptual and philosophical significance; a history of adoption would require its own evidence of policy, transmission, and practice.[35]

The continuing national resonance of Tut Wuri Handayani is consistent with the research's conclusion that Dewantara made an important contribution to Indonesian education. The historical content of that contribution lies in the joining of educational freedom with cultural and moral responsibilities. Recognition of this legacy does not require claiming that every subsequent policy faithfully realizes it. The contrast between a remembered maxim and the demanding relationships it describes is itself instructive. The principle asks educators to exercise authority in ways that enable others to develop their own capacities, an obligation more substantial than repetition of an educational slogan.

Contribution and evidentiary boundaries

The article's contribution is a contextual reconstruction of an educational relationship. It links Dewantara's movement from colonial schooling and political criticism to institution-building, identifies Wasita as a medium addressed to educators, and interprets Tut Wuri Handayani within the Among system. The result preserves the connection between freedom, culture, and human development while specifying the responsibilities of the pamong. This is an intellectual-historical explanation of how a principle made sense within a national educational project; it is not an evaluation of classroom effectiveness.

The evidentiary boundaries also define the novelty. Neither a definitive date of first formulation nor a complete history of reception follows from the six issues and their associated records. The available publication material does not establish that the maxim was explicitly stated in every issue. These limits leave substantial room for further archival work, particularly on complete article texts, reader correspondence, and records

[34] Mora Claramita, "Revealing 'Tut Wuri Handayani'—A Student-Centred Learning Approach—by Ki Hajar Dewantara from the Early 20th Century: A Literature Review," *Jurnal Pendidikan Kedokteran Indonesia* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.22146/jpki.25295.

[35] Dorothy Ferary, "On Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Philosophy of Education," *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education* 5, no. 2 (2021): 65–78, https://doi.org/10.7577/njcie.4156.

of educational practice. They do not negate the conceptual finding. They make clear which part of the relationship can be reconstructed and which further claims would need additional evidence.

Conclusion

Tut Wuri Handayani expressed a principle of responsible educational guidance within Ki Hadjar Dewantara's wider project of national education. His intellectual formation connected the unequal opportunities of colonial schooling with journalism, nationalist activity, exile, and the establishment of Taman Siswa. These experiences helped shape an educational response in which freedom concerned the formation of persons capable of thought, moral judgment, and participation in collective life. The Among system supplied the relationship through which that aim could be pursued: the pamong guided development while preserving room for the learner's initiative.

Wasita's 1936 publication setting situates this relationship within an educational and cultural medium addressed to those responsible for children. Its institutional identity and associated bibliographic records connect the inquiry with contemporary discussions of culture and education. The periodical is significant as a setting for articulating national educational commitments, while its programmatic character requires caution about equating prescription with classroom practice. Tut Wuri Handayani accordingly emerges as part of a conceptual whole involving guidance, natural and historical conditions, moral formation, and cultural life, rather than an isolated injunction to withdraw from teaching.

The historical contribution of Dewantara's principle was to make the purposes and limits of educational authority central to the formation of free persons. The article's contribution and novelty lie in reconstructing that relationship through the conjunction of intellectual biography, institutional publication, and the conceptual structure of Among. This conclusion affirms the enduring philosophical significance of the principle without claiming to establish its first appearance, its uniform expression across the six issues, or its complete implementation in later education. Its value for the history of Indonesian education rests on a precise account of the relationship between human freedom and the responsibilities of those who guide it.

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