

Character education in comparative perspective: Ki Hajar Dewantara's *Budi Pekerti* education and the character and citizenship education framework in Singapore

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Abstract

Character education has become a central concern in contemporary educational discourse because education is expected not only to develop students' intellectual abilities but also to cultivate moral integrity and social responsibility. This study aims to analyze the concept of budi pekerti in the educational thought of Ki Hajar Dewantara and to compare it with the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) framework in Singapore's education system. The research employs a qualitative approach through library research and document analysis of Ki Hajar Dewantara's writings, Singapore's educational policy documents, and relevant academic literature. A comparative analysis was conducted to identify similarities in principles and differences in educational approaches between the two frameworks. The findings reveal that Ki Hajar Dewantara places budi pekerti at the center of education through the Among System, the Tri-Center of Education, and teacher exemplarity, while CCE integrates character education through moral values, civic awareness, and socio-emotional competencies. The novelty of this study lies in its conceptual comparative analysis linking Indonesian educational philosophy with contemporary character education policy.

Keywords: character education; Ki Hajar Dewantara; Character and Citizenship Education; comparative education; Singapore.

Abstrak

Pendidikan karakter menjadi perhatian penting dalam diskursus pendidikan kontemporer karena pendidikan tidak hanya bertujuan mengembangkan kemampuan intelektual, tetapi juga membentuk integritas moral dan tanggung jawab sosial peserta didik. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis konsep pendidikan budi pekerti dalam pemikiran Ki Hajar Dewantara dan membandingkannya dengan kerangka Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) dalam sistem pendidikan Singapura. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi kepustakaan dengan analisis dokumen terhadap karya Ki

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Hajar Dewantara, dokumen kebijakan pendidikan Singapura, serta literatur terkait pendidikan karakter. Analisis komparatif dilakukan untuk mengidentifikasi kesamaan prinsip dan perbedaan pendekatan dalam kedua kerangka pendidikan tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemikiran Ki Hajar Dewantara menempatkan budi pekerti sebagai inti pendidikan melalui Sistem Among, Tri Pusat Pendidikan, dan keteladanan pendidik, sedangkan CCE mengintegrasikan pendidikan karakter melalui penanaman nilai moral, kesadaran kewarganegaraan, dan pengembangan kompetensi sosial-emosional. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada analisis komparatif konseptual yang mempertemukan filsafat pendidikan Ki Hajar Dewantara dengan kebijakan pendidikan karakter modern.

Kata kunci: character and citizenship education; Ki Hajar Dewantara; pendidikan karakter; pendidikan komparatif; Singapura.

Introduction

In the tradition of educational thought, education is not only understood as a process of developing intellectual abilities but also as a process of shaping human personality. In essence, education aims to form individuals who possess moral integrity, social responsibility, and the ability to live ethically within society (Abakar et al., 2025; Marwan et al., 2025; Suciati et al., 2023). Therefore, education is always associated with the cultivation of values, the formation of moral attitudes, and the development of students' character as an integral part of the educational process (Oldham & McLoughlin, 2025). Various studies show that character education plays an important role in shaping students' personalities, increasing moral awareness, and supporting individuals' social and emotional development in social life (Brown et al., 2023; Ramadhani et al., 2024). In addition, recent studies indicate that character education contributes to the development of social skills, emotional regulation, and ethical behavior, which form the foundation for harmonious social life (Hadi et al., 2025; Retnaningrum & Hazhari, 2024). Thus, education does not merely function as a process of knowledge transfer, but also as a process of forming individuals who possess character and civility in social life.

Within the tradition of educational thought in Indonesia, the idea of developing students' morality and personality was clearly articulated by Ki Hajar Dewantara through the concept of *budi pekerti* education. According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, education is not only intended to develop intellectual intelligence but also to shape human character and personality (Fuadi et al., 2025; Widiyanto & Purnomo, 2023). *Budi pekerti* education is understood as a process of cultivating moral values, life attitudes, and social responsibility that form the basis of human behavior in society (Astriani & Samsuri, 2018). Within this framework, education must guide students' development holistically so that they

can grow into individuals who are independent, possess strong character, and are responsible for social life (Dewantara, 1977).

These ideas were realized through various educational principles formulated within the *Taman Siswa* educational system. One of the most well-known principles is the trilogy of educational leadership: *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha*, *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa*, and *Tut Wuri Handayani* (Devi, 2020). This principle emphasizes that the formation of moral character is not only achieved through instruction but also through the example set by educators, guidance throughout the educational process, and the provision of opportunities for students to develop independently (Syafri, 2022). From this perspective, educators play an essential role as moral role models who guide the development of students' character through humanistic and contextual educational interactions.

Furthermore, Ki Hajar Dewantara also formulated the philosophical foundation of education through the concept of the *Panca Dharma* of *Taman Siswa*, namely independence, natural disposition, culture, nationalism, and humanity (Dewantara, 1977). These five principles indicate that education should shape individuals who develop in harmony with social life and cultural values. In this framework, *budi pekerti* education is not only related to individual morality but also to the development of social awareness and responsibility in community life (Astriani & Samsuri, 2018). Thus, education from Ki Hajar Dewantara's perspective has a strong cultural dimension, as the moral values taught are always closely connected to social life and the cultural context of society (Widiyanto & Purnomo, 2023).

In the development of modern educational studies, the idea of cultivating values and morality in education has evolved into the discourse of character education. This concept emphasizes the importance of instilling moral values, shaping attitudes, and fostering social responsibility within the educational process. Various studies show that character education has become an important component of educational policy in many countries because it is considered capable of forming students who are not only academically competent but also possess moral integrity and social awareness (Kristjánsson, 2019; Suciati et al., 2023). In many modern educational systems, character education is often integrated into the national curriculum as part of efforts to build a generation with strong social responsibility and civic awareness (Azhura & Saleh, 2025; Rohman & Mentari, 2024; Sakban & Sundawa, 2023).

One notable example is the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) framework developed within Singapore's education system. This framework positions character education as an integral part of the national education system through the cultivation of moral values, the strengthening of civic awareness, and

the development of students' socio-emotional competencies (Sim & Tham, 2025; Tan & Abbas, 2024). Through this approach, character education is not only understood as the conceptual transmission of values but also as a process of habituating values in school and community life (Tan & S. L. Ng, 2021). Programs such as Values in Action provide students with opportunities to practice moral values through social activities and community service (Sim & Tham, 2025).

Although many studies have examined Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thought, most of them focus primarily on his ideas within the historical context of Indonesian education or on the normative development of the concept of *budi pekerti* education. On the other hand, studies on Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) in Singapore generally focus on the implementation of character education policies within modern educational systems. However, research that specifically examines a comparative analysis between the concept of *budi pekerti* education in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought and the Character and Citizenship Education framework in Singapore remains relatively limited in the educational literature.

Therefore, a comparative study between these two frameworks is important to understand the alignment of character education principles within both educational thought traditions and contemporary educational policies. This article aims to analyze the concept of *budi pekerti* education in the educational thought of Ki Hajar Dewantara and to compare it with the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) framework in Singapore's education system. Through a comparative approach, this study seeks to identify similarities in principles, differences in approaches, and the conceptual relevance of these two educational frameworks in the development of character education in the context of modern education.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design focusing on the analysis of educational thought. The qualitative approach is used because this study does not aim to measure empirical phenomena quantitatively, but rather to understand, interpret, and compare educational concepts that develop within two different intellectual frameworks (Bowen, 2009). Library research is a research method that utilizes various literature sources as primary data to analyze ideas, concepts, and thoughts within a particular field of study (Morgan, 2022). In the context of this study, this approach is used to examine the concept of *budi pekerti* education in the educational thought of Ki Hajar Dewantara and to compare it with the framework of character education within

the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) program developed in Singapore's education system.

This research also employs two analytical approaches: philosophical analysis and comparative education. Philosophical analysis is used to examine educational concepts in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought in depth, particularly those related to *budi pekerti* education, the Among System, the Tri-Center of Education, the concept of freedom in education, and the relationship between moral values, ethics, and culture in shaping human character. This approach enables the researcher to understand the philosophical foundations underlying Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational ideas as well as their relevance to the development of character education.

Meanwhile, the comparative education approach is used to compare the educational principles found in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought with the framework of character education developed within Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) in Singapore. Comparative approaches in educational research aim to understand similarities and differences among educational systems that develop within different social and cultural contexts (Steiner-Khamsi & Morais De Sa E Silva, 2024). Through this approach, the study not only identifies differences between the two educational frameworks but also analyzes the alignment of character education principles embedded within them.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the works of Ki Hajar Dewantara that discuss his educational thought, particularly those related to *budi pekerti* education and the educational principles of the Taman Siswa system. These works serve as the main sources for understanding the educational concepts developed by Ki Hajar Dewantara. In addition, educational policy documents from Singapore related to Character and Citizenship Education (CCE), including curriculum documents and official policies from the Singapore Ministry of Education, are also used as primary sources to understand the framework of character education within Singapore's education system.

Secondary sources in this research include academic books, scholarly journal articles, research reports, and various literature discussing character education, Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thought, and Singapore's education policies. These sources are used to strengthen conceptual analysis and provide broader academic context for the discussion presented in this study. The literature utilized includes studies on character education, philosophy of education, and comparative education relevant to the focus of this research.

Data collection in this study was conducted through document analysis. Document analysis is a data collection technique that involves identifying,

collecting, and examining various documents relevant to the research focus (Yehl, 2014). In this study, the data collection process was carried out by exploring various literature sources relevant to the research topic, including the works of Ki Hajar Dewantara, Singapore's educational policy documents, and academic literature discussing character education and comparative education. All these documents were then systematically analyzed to identify key concepts related to character formation in education.

Data analysis in this study was conducted through several stages. The first stage involved identifying the main concepts of *budi pekerti* education in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought. At this stage, the researcher examined various works of Ki Hajar Dewantara to identify key ideas related to character formation in education, such as the concept of *budi pekerti*, the Among System, the Tri-Center of Education, and the relationship between education and culture.

The second stage involved identifying the principles of character education within the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) framework in Singapore. At this stage, the researcher analyzed Singapore's educational policy documents to understand how character education is formulated and implemented within the national education system. This analysis includes examining the core values developed within CCE, the pedagogical approaches used, and various educational programs designed to shape students' character.

The third stage involved grouping concepts that share similar themes or value orientations. At this stage, educational concepts identified within both frameworks were categorized based on themes, such as moral values, educational environments, pedagogical approaches, and educational objectives. This categorization process aims to facilitate comparative analysis between the two educational frameworks.

The fourth stage involved conducting a comparative analysis to identify similarities in principles, differences in approaches, and conceptual relevance between the concept of *budi pekerti* education in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought and the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) framework in Singapore. Through this comparative analysis, the study seeks to demonstrate how both educational frameworks share common perspectives in positioning education as a process of shaping values and human personality, despite developing within different historical and educational contexts.

Through the overall analytical process, this study aims to obtain a deeper understanding of the relevance of *budi pekerti* education in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought for the development of character education within modern educational policy. Thus, this research not only contributes to the study of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thought but also offers a comparative perspective that

can enrich the discourse on character education in contemporary educational contexts.

Finding and Discussion

A. Finding

The analysis of Ki Hajar Dewantara's works and Singapore's educational policy documents shows that both educational frameworks place character formation as the primary goal of education. Although they developed within different historical contexts and educational systems, both approaches share several principles in positioning education as a process of cultivating values, moral attitudes, and students' social responsibility.

In Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thought, character formation is realized through the concept of *budi pekerti* education. *Budi pekerti* education is understood as a process of cultivating moral values aimed at shaping human character so that individuals can live responsibly within social life. Education does not merely function as a process of transferring knowledge, but also as a process of shaping civilized human personality. Thus, education is viewed as a process of guiding the inner development of students so that they can develop intellectual abilities while also possessing sound moral attitudes in social life.

The findings of this study indicate that the concept of *budi pekerti* education in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought contains several key principles. First, education must place character formation at the core of the educational process. Second, education should involve broad social environments, namely the family, school, and community. Third, education should be implemented through pedagogical approaches that emphasize the role of educators as role models and mentors in the learning process. Fourth, education should provide opportunities for students to develop independently in accordance with their natural dispositions and potential.

One important concept underlying *budi pekerti* education is the Tri-Center of Education (Tri Pusat Pendidikan), which consists of the family, school, and community. These three environments are considered the main spaces for students' character formation. Within the family environment, education takes place through the habituation of moral values in everyday life. The family becomes the first place where children learn responsibility, respect, and good habits. Meanwhile, schools function as environments that strengthen character formation through structured and systematic educational processes. On the other hand, society serves as a social space where students practice moral values in real-life situations.

In addition to the concept of the Tri-Center of Education, Ki Hajar Dewantara also emphasized the importance of the Among System as a pedagogical approach in education. The Among System positions educators as guides who nurture the development of students rather than authorities who impose knowledge. This approach is reflected in the well-known trilogy of educational leadership: Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, and Tut Wuri Handayani. Through these principles, the educational process is carried out through exemplary conduct, guidance, and encouragement for students to develop independently.

The findings also show that Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational concept emphasizes the principle of freedom in education. Freedom in this context does not mean unlimited liberty but refers to providing space for students to develop according to their natural disposition and potential. Education should provide opportunities for students to think, act, and learn independently. Thus, education aims not only to develop intellectually capable individuals but also individuals who possess moral responsibility in social life.

Meanwhile, the analysis of the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) framework in Singapore indicates that character education also constitutes an essential component of the national education system. The CCE program is designed to develop students who possess moral values, civic awareness, and socio-emotional competencies in social life. Within this framework, character education is not only taught through specific subjects but is also integrated into various educational activities within schools.

The findings show that the CCE framework emphasizes several key principles of character education. First, character education is implemented through the cultivation of moral values that guide students' behavior. Second, character education is developed through integrated educational approaches within various school learning activities. Third, character education emphasizes the development of students' socio-emotional competencies. Fourth, character education is developed through social experiences that allow students to practice moral values in real-life situations.

One important approach in the implementation of CCE is the Values in Action (VIA) program, which encourages students to participate in various community service activities. Through these activities, students learn to practice moral values such as social care, responsibility, and solidarity in social life. This approach demonstrates that character education is not only carried out through conceptual learning but also through social experiences that strengthen the internalization of moral values.

Based on the analysis, this study finds that there is a strong alignment of principles between the concept of *budi pekerti* education in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought and the Character and Citizenship Education framework in Singapore. Both approaches position education as a process of shaping values and human personality through educational experiences that are integrated with social life.

The findings of this study can be summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Comparison of Ki Hajar Dewantara's *Budi Pekerti* Education and Singapore's Character and Citizenship Education (CCE)

Aspect	Ki Hajar Dewantara	Term	Singapore CCE	Term
Philosophical foundation	Education based on humanistic values, culture, and individual freedom	<i>Panca Dharma</i> of Taman Siswa	Education based on moral values and citizenship in modern society	Character and Citizenship Education
Educational orientation	Formation of <i>budi pekerti</i> (moral character) as the foundation of human personality	<i>Budi Pekerti</i> Education	Development of moral values and civic responsibility	Character Education
Educational environment	Character formation through family, school, and community	Tri-Center of Education (<i>Tri Pusat Pendidikan</i>)	Character formation through schools, co-curricular activities, and social experiences	Whole School Approach
Role of educators	Educators as role models, mentors, and facilitators of students' development	<i>Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani</i>	Teachers as facilitators of value learning and character development	Teacher as CCE Educator
Pedagogical approach	Education through guidance in accordance with children's natural development	Among System (<i>Sistem Among</i>)	Reflective learning through social experience	Values in Action
Principle of student development	Responsible freedom in individual development	Freedom in Education (<i>Kemerdekaan dalam Pendidikan</i>)	Students as independent individuals and responsible citizens	Self-Directed Learner

Values and culture	Education rooted in cultural values and social life	<i>Panca Dharma</i>	Education instilling moral values as the foundation of social life	Core Values
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Source: Research Analysis

Table 1 shows that although these educational frameworks developed within different historical contexts and educational systems, there is a strong alignment of principles between the concept of *budi pekerti* education in Ki Hajar Dewantara’s thought and the Character and Citizenship Education framework in Singapore. Both approaches position education as a process of shaping values and character through social experiences and integrated educational environments.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the concept of *budi pekerti* education in Ki Hajar Dewantara’s thought shares similar principles with character education approaches developed in modern educational systems. In both frameworks, education is understood as a process of shaping human character through the cultivation of moral values and social experiences.

From the perspective of educational philosophy, Ki Hajar Dewantara’s ideas on *budi pekerti* education are closely related to the concept of character education developed in modern educational studies. Character education is understood as a process of forming moral values through the habituation of values in everyday life (Munawarsyah et al., 2024). This perspective aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara’s view, which emphasizes the importance of educators’ role modeling and social experience in the educational process (Suciati et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the concept of the Tri-Center of Education (Tri Pusat Pendidikan) in Ki Hajar Dewantara’s thought also corresponds with the whole school approach in modern character education (Marnayana et al., 2024; Rafiqah et al., 2025). In this approach, character formation is not only carried out through the formal curriculum but also through the involvement of the entire educational environment, including families and communities. Thus, character formation is understood as a social process involving multiple educational environments.

Another similarity can be seen in the pedagogical approach employed. The Among System developed by Ki Hajar Dewantara positions educators as guides who nurture the development of students. This approach is like modern character education concepts that emphasize the importance of pedagogical relationships between teachers and students in the character formation process (Afrilia, 2024; Harrison et al., 2020). However, there are important differences

between the two educational frameworks. Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought developed within a philosophical framework rooted in cultural and humanistic values. In contrast, Character and Citizenship Education in Singapore has developed within the framework of national education policy designed systematically within a modern educational system.

Despite these differences in developmental context, both educational frameworks demonstrate that character formation is a fundamental element of educational objectives. From this perspective, character education is not only related to the formation of individual morality but also to the development of social responsibility in community life.

The findings of this study are also consistent with previous research indicating that character education constitutes an important component of modern educational systems (Berkowitz, 2022; Dabdoub et al., 2024; Oldham & McLoughlin, 2025). Recent research by Marwan et al. (2025) shows that effective character education programs do not merely emphasize the cognitive learning of values but also involve social experiences that allow students to practice moral values in real-life contexts. This indicates that character education requires a holistic educational approach that is integrated with students' social lives.

Thus, the comparative analysis in this study demonstrates that the concept of *budi pekerti* education in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought has strong relevance to the development of character education in modern educational systems. The alignment of principles between the two frameworks indicates that character formation remains a primary objective of education across various traditions of educational thought.

Conclusion

This study aims to analyze and compare the concept of character education in the educational thought of Ki Hajar Dewantara with the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) framework in Singapore's education system. Based on the analysis of Ki Hajar Dewantara's works and Singapore's educational policy documents, the study shows that character formation constitutes a fundamental element of educational objectives, both in the tradition of educational thought and in modern educational policy frameworks.

The findings indicate that in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought, character education is manifested through the concept of *budi pekerti* education, which emphasizes the cultivation of moral values, the development of life attitudes, and students' social responsibility. These principles are reflected in several educational ideas proposed by Ki Hajar Dewantara, such as the Tri-Center of Education (Tri Pusat Pendidikan), the Among System, the concept of freedom in

education, and the relationship between ethics and culture in shaping human personality. Within this framework, education is understood as a process of human development that occurs through educators' role modeling, social experiences, and the involvement of family, school, and community environments.

Meanwhile, within Singapore's education system, character formation is developed through the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) framework, which emphasizes the cultivation of moral values, the strengthening of civic awareness, and the development of students' socio-emotional competencies. Character education within this framework is not only taught through the formal curriculum but is also integrated into various educational activities that provide students with social experiences in both school and community life.

The comparative analysis shows that although these frameworks developed in different historical contexts and educational systems, there is a significant alignment of principles between the concept of *budi pekerti* education in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought and the character education approach within the CCE framework in Singapore. Both approaches position education as a process of shaping students' values and personalities through educational experiences integrated with social life. The main difference lies in their developmental contexts: Ki Hajar Dewantara's ideas emerged within a philosophical educational framework rooted in cultural values, whereas CCE developed as a national education policy systematically designed within a modern educational system.

The novelty of this research lies in its conceptual comparative analysis that brings together the concept of *budi pekerti* education in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought with the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) framework in Singapore's education system. Through this approach, the study demonstrates that the concept of *budi pekerti* education, which developed within the Indonesian tradition of educational thought, shares important similarities with character education approaches in modern educational policy. These findings provide a new perspective on the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thought in the development of character education within contemporary educational contexts.

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