



Leadership Values of “Ki Hajar Dewantara”: A Case of Kindergarten Principals in Indonesia

E. S. C. NINGRUM, H. HERWIN, N. A. PURWANTO

ABSTRACT

The problem and the aim of the study. Ki Hajar Dewantara’s leadership philosophy offers a culturally grounded framework for educational leadership in Indonesia. These values emphasize moral role-modeling, collaborative motivation, and supportive empowerment, aligning closely with contemporary transformational and inclusive leadership theories. *This study aims* to explore perspectives, understand implementation, and identify supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara’s leadership values by kindergarten principals in Indonesia.

Research methods. This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore how kindergarten principals in Indonesia interpret and apply Ki Hajar Dewantara’s leadership values within their daily practices. The participants used were 15 principals who were selected purposively based on their experience, training background, and active involvement in early childhood education communities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis to capture the lived experiences and cultural meanings associated with leadership values such as Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo, Ing Madyo Mangun Karso, and Tut Wuri Handayani. Thematic analysis was used to process the data, involving open, axial, and selective coding to identify core categories, while data validity was ensured through triangulation and member checking.

Results. This study found that Ki Hajar Dewantara’s leadership values guide daily leadership practices, from setting examples through discipline and behavior, to fostering collaboration and supporting teacher autonomy. Five main themes were identified, with Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo as the most dominant theme, with 12 occurrences. Ing Madyo Mangun Karso (The Power of Faith) was found with 10 occurrences, and Tut Wuri Handayani with 9 occurrences. Two other themes that emerged were Local and Religious Values with 6 occurrences, and Leadership Challenges with 5 occurrences. Thematic coding results show that Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo is the most dominant theme, followed by participatory leadership, empowerment, integration of local values, and leadership challenges. Principals also relate Dewantara’s values to local cultural and religious traditions, enhancing their acceptance within diverse school communities. However, the lack of formal training based on these philosophical principles presents a key challenge, as most principals rely on personal or informal learning. The success of value-based leadership is influenced by school context, including community support and resource availability. When implemented effectively, these leadership values foster inclusive, ethical, and humanistic school cultures that benefit teachers, students, and parents alike.

Conclusion. This study concludes that Ki Hajar Dewantara’s leadership values – Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo, Ing Madyo Mangun Karso, and Tut Wuri Handayani—remain highly relevant and effectively guide kindergarten principals in Indonesia toward transformative, participative, and ethical leadership. These values positively influence school climate, teacher motivation, and community trust, especially when integrated with local and religious cultural norms. However, the study also highlights a gap in professional development, as most principals internalize these values through informal means rather than structured training.

KEYWORDS

leadership values, Ki Hajar Dewantara, kindergarten, principals, early childhood education, philosophy, case study

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INTRODUCTION

Recent research highlights the growing urgency of integrating local values into educational leadership while aligning with international initiatives such as those led by the United Nations. Educational leadership is seen as a critical driver for systemic reforms [1], not only in local contexts but also in international education landscapes [2]. The UN, particularly through UNESCO, has significantly influenced global education policy, promoting inclusive and equitable education as part of the Sustainable Development Goals [3]. However, aligning these global frameworks with local cultural and educational needs presents ongoing challenges. Leaders must navigate cultural diversity [4] and develop strategies for inclusive leadership that respect local values while promoting international-mindedness, a concept that remains contested in various cultural contexts [5].

Despite these challenges, the integration of local values into educational leadership offers key opportunities for fostering innovation and educational diplomacy. There is a growing call for educational leaders to develop inclusive cultures that support both global and local priorities, contributing to sustainable education systems [6]. Education institutions play a pivotal role by partnering with international organizations to influence policy [7] and promote culturally relevant leadership models [8]. Nevertheless, gaps remain in leadership preparation programs, which often rely on Western-centric models that may not fully address the realities of local communities [9]. Future research should further explore how educational leadership can balance global goals with local educational philosophies to ensure more equitable and contextually responsive practices.

Education plays a vital role in human resource development, particularly in Indonesia, highlighting the country's commitment to advancing its human capital. The Indonesian government prioritizes education as a fundamental vehicle for national development. Tarigan discusses the significance of educational progress in Indonesia, emphasizing its critical role in individual adaptability during rapid change and addressing broader societal challenges [10].

The establishment of early childhood education programs, such as kindergartens, is particularly significant in this context. These institutions focus on managing children's growth and development, laying the groundwork for future educational success. The promotion of kindergartens as essential for human resource development aligns with findings that structured primary education improves the quality of human resources [11].

Additionally, the impact of educational governance strategies is noteworthy. Research indicates that the implementation of school-based management significantly enhances educational quality at the primary level, positively influencing the overall educational landscape in Indonesia [12]. Education's influence extends beyond individual institutions; it interacts with the Human Development Index (HDI), with government initiatives in education correlating positively with HDI improvements [13].

In the digital age, the shift towards online and corporate learning strategies, as explored by Sudewo and Welly, illustrates the adaptation of educational systems to modern demands, enhancing human capital in various sectors, including public health and drug control [14]. This shift is crucial for providing updated competencies necessary in today's rapidly changing environment.

Lastly, the broader social role of education should not be overlooked. Wiwin et al. highlight that building organizational commitment within educational institutions can enhance employee performance, leading to improved educational outcomes [15]. This is essential not only for the development of individual learners but also for the enhancement of overall educational quality, thus serving as a cornerstone for Indonesia's advancement on the global stage.

The low participation in early childhood education (ECE) in Indonesia presents formidable challenges to improving the quality of human resources from the onset. Despite government initiatives promoting various ECE programs and compulsory education policies, a significant number of children remain unreached by both formal and non-formal educational services. Multiple factors contribute to this persistent issue, including limited access due to geographic disparities, inadequate parental awareness regarding the importance of early educational engagement, and a dearth of qualified educators and facilities in rural areas [16].

Geographic accessibility is a significant barrier impacting ECE participation, particularly in underserved regions where educational institutions are fewer and harder to access. The distribution of ECE institutions, such as the 187,211 Early Childhood Education Programs across Indonesia, fails to ensure adequate coverage in remote areas, limiting opportunities for many children [17]. Furthermore, the concentration of teachers and educational programs in urban locations exacerbates the disparities in educational access and quality [18]. The shortage of properly trained educators also detracts from program effectiveness, as many institutions are unable to meet government-established professional standards due to financial and logistical constraints [16].

Parental attitudes toward ECE constitute another significant challenge. Many families in rural or economically disadvantaged areas prioritize immediate economic contributions from children over educational engagement, viewing ECE as an unnecessary expense rather than a crucial investment in their child's future [19]. Research indicates that increased parental understanding of ECE's importance is closely linked to participation rates. For instance, initiatives that enhance parental awareness regarding the developmental benefits of early education can potentially boost enrolment significantly [19].

Additionally, socioeconomic factors further complicate the landscape of ECE participation. Families with lower socioeconomic status often lack the financial means and perceived necessity to invest in early education, leading to the mindset that adequate child development can occur outside formal learning environments [20]. This perspective is compounded by insufficient government support and outreach efforts, which fail to engage or educate communities on the long-term advantages of ECE [18].

Principals play a crucial role in creating a culture of inclusive education within early childhood settings. This involves acknowledging and responding to the diversity among children and ensuring that all educational practices align with the principles of "Education for All" [21]. Effective leadership facilitates a shared vision among staff members, which is vital for fostering high-quality educational outcomes [22]. By implementing robust management systems, principals can ensure that human resources are optimized, thereby driving the institution towards achieving its educational goals [21]. Furthermore, research has shown that when principals empower their staff through trust and delegation, it enhances administrative performance and overall organizational effectiveness [23].

The concept of distributed leadership has gained prominence in understanding effective practices in ECE. This model advocates for shared decision-making between leaders and frontline educators, thus distributing responsibilities and empowering teachers [24]. Such an approach not only motivates staff but also enables educators to exercise leadership qualities within their classrooms, fostering a collaborative environment conducive to professional growth and improved student outcomes [25]. For instance, leadership discussions among educators highlight the interconnectedness of ECEC values and curriculum, emphasizing that effective leadership must consider the unique contexts in which these professionals operate [25].

Moreover, effective leadership in ECE is associated with better engagement of all stakeholders, including educators, parents, and the community, which is critical in supporting children's development [26]. Principals who embody transformational leadership traits inspire teachers and staff to enhance their professional practices, thereby improving educational quality [27]. Studies indicate that enhanced leadership practices lead to significant improvements in teacher retention rates [28], job satisfaction, and pedagogical practices [27], further indicating the importance of effective principal leadership in creating a high-performing educational setting [29].

Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy provides a foundational understanding of leadership in the Indonesian educational context, which is deeply intertwined with the country's cultural identity and national spirit. Central to Dewantara's pedagogical model is the leadership triad: "ing ngarsa sung tuladha" (leading by example), "ing madyo mangun karso" (fostering will), and "tut wuri handayani" (inspiring innovation through support). This triad underlines a holistic approach, emphasizing moral responsibility, motivational support, and creative empowerment among educators and students alike [30].

The concept of "ing ngarsa sung tuladha" highlights the importance of educators as role models. Research indicates that leaders who actively engage in knowledge sharing and exhibit transformational qualities significantly influence organizational performance and employee engagement, a principle that echoes Dewantara's emphasis on leading by example [31]. This

connection aligns with findings that transformational leadership fosters positive educational environments conducive to student [32] and teacher satisfaction [33].

Moreover, Dewantara's principle of "ing madyo mangun karso" signifies the necessity of fostering will among stakeholders in educational settings. Encouraging motivational support is critical as educational leaders navigate the challenges posed by disparate school cultures and resource limitations [32]. For instance, fostering knowledge-sharing behavior among teachers has been linked to improved innovation performance in educational settings, emphasizing the significance of supportive leadership in cultivating a conducive learning atmosphere [30].

The element of "tut wuri handayani" embodies the essence of inspiring innovation and supporting students and teachers in their developmental journeys. In today's educational landscape, which is marked by rapid changes and challenges, inclusive leadership practices have shown to enhance safety behavior among workers, indicating that leaders who prioritize support can effectively nurture a positive culture within educational institutions [34]. By integrating local cultural values into leadership practices, educational leaders can further enhance their effectiveness, aligning with Dewantara's vision of educational empowerment rooted in national identity [35].

The urgent need for awareness in kindergarten education underscores the pivotal role of school principals as leaders and managers. Their leadership significantly shapes educational outcomes and school progress. Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership philosophy has practical implications in fostering positive interaction patterns within schools, emphasizing the importance of guidance and professional development for teachers. Research indicates that despite awareness of their integral role, kindergarten directors often fall short in providing effective teacher guidance and instructional leadership [36].

Effective leadership can enhance the educational environment, promoting holistic development among children, as noted in studies correlating environmental quality with child outcomes [37]. This reinforces the need to equip principals with strategies and frameworks akin to Dewantara's ideals to foster an environment conducive to learning and development, bridging gaps in leadership practices in early childhood education. This study aims to explore perspectives, understand implementation, and identify supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values by kindergarten principals in Indonesia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. This approach was chosen to explore in depth the leadership values of Ki Hajar Dewantara as interpreted and practiced by kindergarten principals in Indonesia. Case studies are used because they allow researchers to understand the phenomenon of leadership in a particular social and cultural context, as well as to examine the internal processes that occur in daily leadership practices in kindergarten environments [38].

The subjects in this study were 15 kindergarten principals who were selected purposively from various regions in Indonesia, with the following criteria: having more than five years of leadership experience, having participated in leadership training based on Ki Hajar Dewantara's values, and being active in early childhood education communities. The selection of participants was carried out to ensure representation of experience and a deep understanding of leadership values in the context of local culture.

Data collection techniques in this study included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to allow exploration of personal narratives and meanings constructed by participants towards Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values such as Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo, Ing Madyo Mangun Karso, and Tut Wuri Handayani. Observations were conducted during school visits to observe leadership practices in daily activities, while documentation included analysis of school documents, internal policies, and records of the principal's activities.

The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques [39]. The analysis process began with interview transcription, then an open coding stage was carried out to identify

initial themes. Next, axial coding was carried out to connect between themes and find in-depth relational patterns. In the final stage, the thematization was carried out to form core categories that represent Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of techniques and sources, as well as member checking of participants to ensure the validity of data interpretation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Principals play a pivotal role in fostering a culture of inclusive education, particularly in early childhood settings where diversity among learners is most visible and foundational. Their leadership involves actively acknowledging and addressing the varied needs of all children, ensuring that educational practices align with global commitments such as "Education for All" [21]. Developing a shared vision among staff is essential, as it lays the groundwork for collaborative practices that promote high-quality learning outcomes [40]. In this context, principals are not only administrators but also instructional leaders who create inclusive policies and advocate for equitable learning environments from the earliest stages of education [22].

Moreover, effective principals implement management strategies that optimize human resources, aligning individual roles with broader institutional goals [23]. Empowerment through trust and delegation has been identified as a key factor in enhancing both staff morale and organizational performance [41]. By cultivating a collaborative leadership style, principals encourage innovation and responsiveness among teachers and support staff, leading to more effective educational practices. This approach not only improves administrative efficiency but also strengthens the overall capacity of early childhood institutions to meet diverse educational needs in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

The concept of distributed leadership has become increasingly relevant in early childhood education (ECE), emphasizing shared decision-making between institutional leaders and frontline educators [24]. Rather than centralizing authority, this model promotes the delegation of responsibilities, empowering teachers to take active roles in leadership processes [42]. By fostering collaboration, distributed leadership motivates staff and allows educators to develop leadership capacities within their own classrooms, which can lead to enhanced professional growth and better learning outcomes for children [43]. This approach shifts the focus from hierarchical control to collective expertise, creating a more dynamic and responsive educational environment.

Furthermore, leadership dialogues among ECE professionals often reveal how deeply interconnected leadership practices are with curriculum development and core educational values [43]. Effective leadership in early childhood settings must therefore account for the specific cultural, social, and institutional contexts in which educators work. By recognizing teachers as co-leaders, early childhood centers can create a culture of continuous learning and shared accountability [25]. This collaborative leadership model not only enhances organizational resilience but also ensures that educational practices remain relevant and adaptable to the unique needs of young learners and their communities.

Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values play a crucial role in shaping a positive learning culture within Indonesian education, particularly in early childhood settings. His triadic principles – Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo (leading by example), Ing Madyo Mangun Karso (fostering motivation), and Tut Wuri Handayani (providing support) – embody a holistic approach reflecting the significance of moral and cultural dimensions in leadership [44]. Dewantara's philosophy aligns with contemporary educational leadership theories [45] that emphasize the importance of culturally relevant practices in fostering effective learning environments [46]. The intersection of cultural relevance with leadership in educational settings underscores the necessity for leaders to promote values [47] that resonate with local contexts while adhering to effective leadership frameworks [48]. By integrating Dewantara's principles, educators can enhance their leadership effectiveness, ultimately contributing to the advancement of educational quality [49] and the nurturing of interpersonal relationships in the learning process [50].

The integration of Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership principles in kindergarten settings promotes a constructive environment conducive to developing student character and enhancing school culture. Specifically, the Tut Wuri Handayani principle encourages principals to support autonomy among

teachers, which can lead to more creative and engaging learning environments essential for early childhood development [51]. However, many kindergarten principals in Indonesia face challenges due to a lack of systematic leadership training, relying heavily on personal experiences instead. This inexperience results in a diversity of leadership quality across kindergartens [52].

Moreover, strengthening local values, as espoused by Dewantara, can be a viable approach to enhancing leadership competence among these principals. Transformational leadership traits, such as setting clear goals and fostering an inclusive culture, play a critical role in improving teacher performance and overall school efficacy [53]. Effective leadership not only shapes a positive school culture but also aligns teachers' motivations and commitments with organizational objectives, ultimately benefiting students [54].

Values-based leadership has been shown to foster trust and motivation within educational contexts, particularly in early childhood settings. Leadership qualities such as integrity and empathy not only create meaningful relationships but also align with the Indonesian principle of *Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo*, which emphasizes the significance of role modeling in educational leadership [55]. Effective leadership in early childhood education is further defined by a collaborative and reflective approach [56]; these leaders must integrate shared visions and values among their teaching teams to cultivate a positive educational atmosphere [57].

The application of local cultural principles such as *ing madyo mangun karso*, which fosters collaborative spirit, is imperative for enhancing informal and participatory educational environments [58]. However, literature gaps persist, specifically regarding the real-world application of Ki Hajar Dewantara's values in kindergarten leadership, indicating an urgent need for further research focusing on practical implementations within these contexts [59].

In conclusion, effective leadership in early childhood education requires a balanced integration of inclusive, distributed, and culturally grounded leadership practices. Principals play a central role in creating learning environments that respect diversity, empower educators, and foster collaborative school cultures aligned with global commitments such as "Education for All." The incorporation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values – *Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo*, *Ing Madyo Mangun Karso*, and *Tut Wuri Handayani* – offers a culturally relevant framework that complements contemporary leadership models by emphasizing moral integrity, motivation, and support. However, the gap in systematic leadership training for kindergarten principals in Indonesia highlights the need for capacity-building initiatives that bridge theoretical knowledge with practical applications. The recommendations of various studies focus on exploring strategies related to Dewantara principles in everyday leadership practices to ensure that early childhood education not only advances academic goals but also fosters character development and communal values.

Thus, this study contributes to the literature on educational leadership by presenting a new understanding of the application of Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values in the context of early childhood education. This study not only enriches academic discourse, but also provides practical implications for the development of kindergarten principal leadership in Indonesia through an approach based on local wisdom and national culture.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values are still very relevant and are applied in real terms by kindergarten principals. The three main principles in Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership philosophy are seen to color various aspects of leadership, from decision-making, teacher coaching, to interactions with students and parents. This study found that kindergarten principals consistently apply the leadership values inherited from Ki Hajar Dewantara in their daily practices. The three main principles – *Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo* (setting an example in front), *Ing Madyo Mangun Karso* (building enthusiasm in the middle), and *Tut Wuri Handayani* (giving encouragement behind) – are internalized in their attitudes and actions as early childhood education leaders. The following presents the results of thematic coding based on findings in the field.

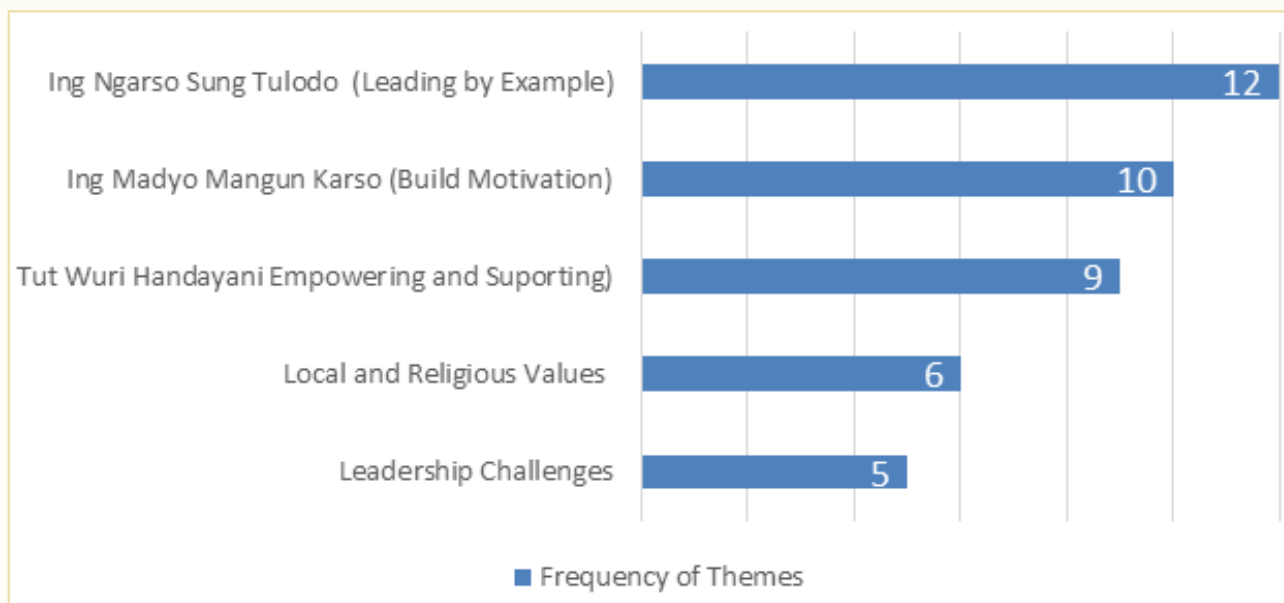


Figure 1 Thematic coding results: Leadership values of Kihajar Dewantara

The horizontal bar graph shown shows five main themes found from the qualitative data analysis. The theme of "Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo" has the highest dominance, followed by "Ing Madyo Mangun Karso", "Tut Wuri Handayani", integration of local values, and leadership challenges. These results are also supported by the results of open-axial-selective coding presented as follows.

Table 1

Results of the open-axial-selective coding

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Setting example by arriving on time	Principal as role model	Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo
Being a role model in behavior	Principal as role model	Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo
Informal discussions with teachers	Participative leadership	Ing Madyo Mangun Karso
Fostering team spirit	Participative leadership	Ing Madyo Mangun Karso
Allowing teaching method flexibility	Teacher empowerment	Tut Wuri Handayani
Encouraging teacher innovation	Teacher empowerment	Tut Wuri Handayani
Linking values with local/religious culture	Integration of local values	Local and Religious Values
Practicing mutual cooperation at school	Integration of local values	Local and Religious Values
Lack of leadership training	Professional challenges	Leadership Challenges
Learning values from personal experience	Professional challenges	Leadership Challenges

The principle of Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo is strongly reflected in the exemplary practices of school principals, both in terms of discipline, responsibility, and work ethics. The participating principals demonstrated a commitment to being behavioral models for teachers and staff. For example, they came to school early, dressed neatly, and showed patience and compassion in interacting with children. This exemplary behavior not only builds trust but also creates a positive work culture in the school environment.

The principle of Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo is very apparent in how school principals display exemplary behavior. They are models in terms of discipline, hard work, and concern for students and teachers. Most principals arrive earlier than teachers, are always dressed neatly, and are polite to all

members of the school community. This exemplary behavior is believed to be able to foster a positive culture in schools and strengthen the legitimacy of their leadership.

The principle of Ing Madyo Mangun Karso is manifested in participatory leadership practices that invite teachers and staff to be actively involved in designing school programs. The principal routinely holds informal discussions, weekly meetings, and reflection forums with teachers to build enthusiasm and create a collaborative working atmosphere. This approach is considered capable of motivating teachers to be more creative and innovative in developing fun and meaningful learning activities. The principal involves teachers in designing learning activities and developing school programs. For example, they routinely hold weekly reflective meetings to discuss learning ideas. This method makes teachers feel appreciated and encourages the emergence of bottom-up innovation.

Meanwhile, the Tut Wuri Handayani principle is seen in the provision of support and freedom for teachers to experiment with learning methods that suit the character of the child. The principal does not act authoritarian but rather acts more as a facilitator and encouragement. They also often give awards and reinforcement to teachers, which ultimately increases teachers' self-confidence and job satisfaction.

The Tut Wuri Handayani principle is seen in the role of the principal as a supporter, facilitator, and motivator. The principal gives teachers space to innovate with teaching methods that suit the characteristics of early childhood. They do not act strictly controlling, but rather foster self-confidence through praise, symbolic awards, and ongoing personal development.

Another interesting finding is how principals relate these values to local contexts and spirituality. Several principals stated that Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values are in line with local religious and cultural values, such as mutual cooperation, humility, and compassion. This integration between local values and national educational philosophy strengthens the acceptance and internalization of leadership values in the school environment.

This study found that there were efforts to integrate local and religious values into leadership practices. Principals linked Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy to local values such as cooperation, politeness, and compassion that stem from culture and religion. This approach strengthens the acceptance and internalization of leadership values in a socially and culturally diverse school community.

However, principals also face challenges in implementing these values consistently. One of the main obstacles is the lack of leadership training based on local and philosophical values. The majority of principals rely on personal experience or informal learning to understand and apply Ki Hajar Dewantara's values. This indicates a gap in the principal development system.

The results of interviews and observations also show that the biggest challenge in implementing these values is the limited leadership training based on national culture. Most principals develop an understanding of Ki Hajar Dewantara's values through personal experience, community networks, or non-formal education. This indicates the need to design leadership training that is structured and based on local values.

In addition, the results of the study revealed that the success of implementing leadership values is highly dependent on the school context, including foundation support, teacher conditions, and parental involvement. Schools with strong community support tend to be more successful in internalizing these values than schools that face structural constraints such as a shortage of teachers or limited facilities.

Value-based leadership has been shown to have a positive impact on school climate. Teachers feel more appreciated, children learn in a more inclusive and loving atmosphere, and parents feel more confident in the ongoing educational process. This condition strengthens the relationship between schools and the community and improves the overall quality of educational services.

Furthermore, this study found that the implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's values also encourages the formation of an inclusive and humanistic organizational culture. The principal not only manages the school administratively but also acts as a driver of values and culture. They become guardians of institutional morality as well as agents of social transformation at the grassroots level.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values are not only symbolic or ceremonial but can be actualized in real leadership practices in early childhood education units. Kindergarten principals who understand and live these values can create an educational environment that is in harmony with the nation's identity, while also being adaptive to the dynamics of the times.

DISCUSSION

In Indonesia, the discourse surrounding educational leadership is significantly informed by the philosophies of Ki Hajar Dewantara, who emphasized both managerial and ethical dimensions of leadership that are critical to fostering a positive learning culture, particularly in early childhood education settings like kindergartens. His principles guide school leaders to internalize moral values and cultural awareness in their approach to leadership [44].

Research has highlighted the pivotal role of leadership in cultivating environments conducive to educational reform and advancement. Effective educational leaders embody virtues of servant leadership [60] and possess a clear vision, facilitating a collaborative spirit among teachers to achieve common educational goals [61]. Furthermore, moral leadership is increasingly recognized as vital [62]; it cultivates ethical behavior and informs decision-making processes within educational institutions, reinforcing the necessity of aligning leadership practices with cultural values to address the unique challenges of Indonesia's educational landscape [63].

The values embodied in Ing Madyo Mangun Karso's approach to leadership emphasize the critical role of collaborative dynamics in educational settings. By positioning himself as a colleague rather than a traditional authoritative figure, he fosters an environment conducive to dialogue, where teachers feel valued and intrinsically motivated. Weekly informal meetings exemplify this practice, enhancing emotional and psychological engagement among educators, a principle consistent with transformational leadership paradigms [49], which emphasize deep team involvement and support [46]. Such interactions not only build camaraderie but also align with educational theories proposing that effective leadership is rooted in participatory practices and shared visions, essential for continual improvement in teaching quality [64]. The dialogic spaces created in these informal settings affirm the necessity for principals to engage actively and inclusively with their faculty, thereby driving a collective pursuit of educational excellence [65].

The principle of Tut Wuri Handayani emphasizes a shift in the role of school principals from sole controllers to facilitators of educators' pedagogical practices. By allowing teachers the freedom to explore innovative teaching methods, the principal fosters an environment of professional autonomy while aligning with educational policies that benefit student development. This principle aligns with pedagogical theories advocating for teacher empowerment and collaborative innovation in teaching [44].

In this context, principals adopting Tut Wuri Handayani not only motivate but also support teachers, thereby enhancing overall educational quality [45]. The reinforcement of this principle through effective leadership practices demonstrates its efficacy, as seen in studies highlighting the correlation between facilitative leadership and improved teacher performance [66]. Consequently, this approach transforms the educational landscape [51], enabling both creative teaching strategies and adherence to the educational ethos [67].

Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy effectively integrates local and religious values, promoting a cohesive framework for multicultural education and character development. Studies indicate a significant alignment between Dewantara's philosophies and local cultural and religious teachings, facilitating application within communities [68]. For instance, the emphasis on accommodating local customs within religious practices reflects a broader trend of integrating local wisdom [69] with educational philosophies, enhancing community engagement in character education [70]. Moreover, when religious education incorporates local cultural values, it can counter radical ideologies while fostering an environment conducive to peaceful coexistence [70]. This synergy underscores the importance of contextualized education, suggesting that character building is most effective when

rooted in familiar socio-cultural contexts [71]. Consequently, Dewantara's approach serves as an essential model for developing students' character in diverse educational settings [72].

The gap in formal training on values-based leadership presents significant challenges for educational leaders. Principals often rely on intuition and personal experiences, highlighting the necessity for structured mentoring [73] and training systems [74]. The integration of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy within school leadership practices can enhance the operational effectiveness of principals [75], creating an environment where values are actively incorporated into decision-making processes [76]. Additionally, aligning leadership styles with educational philosophy is critical for promoting ethical standards and fostering a constructive school culture [77]. Augmented formal training could address these knowledge gaps and reinforce leadership integrity [78], facilitating the adoption of transformative practices that align with the core educational values of Dewantara [79].

Ki Hajar Dewantara's values not only function as moral guidelines, but also as managerial and social instruments in managing interpersonal relationships in schools. The principal plays a role as a value keeper as well as a facilitator of organizational culture. This confirms the findings on the importance of value-based leadership in education. However, the sustainability of the implementation of these values is highly dependent on the available support system. If there is no reinforcement from teacher education institutions and principal training, then these values will only survive as personal knowledge that is not institutionalized. Therefore, there needs to be synergy between national education policies and contextual local training to develop educational leaders who are rooted in national values. Finally, this finding confirms that Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values are not obsolete or merely historical but are highly applicable and relevant to contemporary leadership challenges, especially in early childhood education. The application of these values not only strengthens the identity of national education, but also provides an alternative leadership model

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the leadership values of Ki Hajar Dewantara – Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo (to lead by example), Ing Madyo Mangun Karso (to build spirit among peers), and Tut Wuri Handayani (to support from behind) – remain highly relevant and applicable in the context of early childhood education leadership in Indonesia. Kindergarten principals who embody these values in their daily practices demonstrate transformative, participative, and ethical leadership that enhances the overall school climate.

The integration of local and religious cultural values into leadership practices further strengthens the resonance and acceptance of these philosophical principles. However, the study also reveals gaps in professional development, as most principals rely on informal learning and personal experiences to internalize and practice these values. Despite this, their leadership has a positive impact on teacher motivation, school culture, and community trust.

This study has important implications for leadership practices in early childhood education. The leadership values of Ki Hajar Dewantara that are actualized in the form of exemplary behavior, empowerment, and mentoring show that leadership rooted in national culture is able to create an ethical, humanistic, and participatory educational environment. This is evidence that local philosophy does not conflict with the principles of modern leadership, and even enriches the transformative leadership approach in the Indonesian context.

In addition, the integration of local and religious values in leadership practices shows that a local wisdom-based approach is relevant to forming an inclusive and contextual school organizational culture. This strengthens the position of Ki Hajar Dewantara's values as part of a multicultural education approach and national character. Therefore, these values not only function as individual moral guidelines, but also as a systemic framework in the development of a holistic educational ecosystem.

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Authors

Eka Sapti Cahya Ningrum

(Indonesia, Yogyakarta)

Senior Lecturer, Department of Early Childhood Education

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

E-mail: eka_sapticn@uny.ac.id

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2137-0281

Herwin Herwin

(Indonesia, Yogyakarta)

Associate Professor,

Department of Elementary School Education

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

E-mail: herwin89@uny.ac.id

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8882-5087

Nurtanio Agus Purwanto

(Indonesia, Yogyakarta)

Professor, Doctor of Education,

Department of Educational Administration

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

E-mail: nurtanio@uny.ac.id

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5376-9129

Author's contribution

Eka Sapti Cahya Ningrum: Conceptualization, Methodology, Review, Formal analysis

Herwin Herwin: Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft

Nurtanio Agus Purwanto: Supervision, Visualization, Project Administration

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