

Arabic Language Learning Design in the Digital Era: A Critical Pedagogy of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Thought

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational ideas, particularly the concepts of the nature of times and the nature of human beings, as well as the among system, can be rearticulated in the context of technology-based Arabic language learning with a critical pedagogy approach. Through critical framing, this article seeks not only to translate traditional values into modern media but also to assess the potential and limitations in the power relations between teachers, students, and digital platforms. The methodology used is a literature study supported by conceptual and reflective analysis. The data sources are various scholarly literatures related to Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts, Arabic language learning in the digital era, as well as critical pedagogy as a perspective to reinterpret Ki Hajar Dewantara's principles within a critical pedagogy framework to formulate an Arabic language learning model design that is responsive to the realities of the digital era. The analysis results indicate that the principle of the nature of human beings encourages the decentralization of learning structures, allowing digital Arabic content to be personalized to appreciate the unique potential of students. The principle of the nature of the times promotes the integration of technology into Arabic language learning as a relevant means to respond to contemporary social and cultural realities. The among system (*ing ngarsa sung tuladha, ing madya mangun karsa, tut wuri handayani*) can be reconceptualized as a pattern of teacher-student relationships in digital spaces, where the teacher acts as a guiding facilitator, an active companion in the learning process, and an encourager who supports the student's autonomy in digital Arabic language learning. Through the lens of critical pedagogy, the proposed model also emphasizes the importance of social and collective awareness, so that Arabic language learning is not only a linguistic skill but also an emancipatory practice that strengthens identity, a sense of solidarity, and students' critical reflection abilities.

Keywords: *Arabic Language Learning Design, The Digital Era, Critical Pedagogy, Ki Hajar Dewantara's Thought.*

1) INTRODUCTION

Learning Arabic in the digital era can no longer rely on conventional methods such as memorizing vocabulary from thick books or just listening to cassette recordings, because today's generation grows up with gadgets and the internet. Technology allows students to learn Arabic through interactive

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applications that provide immediate feedback, making the learning process faster and less boring. Students who used to be afraid to read classic texts because they found the diacritics difficult to understand can now use applications that read sentences aloud while showing the meaning of each word. Social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and others already offer a lot of Arabic language learning content packaged with humor, songs, and short animations, making a language that was once considered difficult become easy for students. (Al-Arif & Gumiandari, 2024) Nowadays, teachers can even hold online classes with students from various regions across different countries in the world, allowing students to practice speaking with native speakers without having to fly to the Middle East. In other words, technology is no longer an option but a necessity to keep the Arabic language relevant and not left behind amid the onslaught of global languages. Without adopting digital developments, we risk losing the younger generation who should be inheriting the richness of Islamic civilization through the Arabic language.

In addition, technological developments have opened up unprecedented access to authentic and original primary sources in the Arabic language. Now, ancient manuscripts from libraries in various countries can be accessed within seconds through digital library websites, complete with translations and explanations that make it easier for beginners. Students can attend lectures by prominent scholars directly via Zoom or YouTube, whereas in the past they had to save for years just to study for a few months in Egypt or Yemen. Technology also enables personalized learning, where AI-based applications can adjust the material according to each student's weaknesses, such as providing more *balaghah* exercises for those weak in rhetoric or more *muhadatsah* practice for those afraid to speak. On the other hand, Arabic language learning communities around the world are now connected through WhatsApp groups, Discord, or language clubs on apps like Clubhouse, keeping motivation high even when learning from home. Efforts to adopt technology in Arabic language learning are not merely a trend, but a form of responsibility to ensure that Arabic continues to thrive and is cherished by students in the digital era (Sprenger & Schwaninger, 2021).

Learning Arabic in the digital era requires a paradigmatic reference so that the learning process does not lose its substance. Efforts to adopt the thoughts of figures relevant to educational values in the context of Indonesian culture are still necessary. One of the educational figures who has expressed many constructive ideas and has relevance to learning Arabic in the digital era is Ki Hajar Dewantara, who has conveyed ideas related to the nature of human beings, the nature of times, as well as the

among system consisting of ing ngarsa sung tuladha, ing madya mangun karsa, tut wuri handayani (Nayla, et.al., 2024).

2) METHODS

This article is the result of a literature study that explores various scholarly works relevant to the design of Arabic language learning in the digital era as a critical pedagogy of Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought. In the process, the chosen data collection method is a comprehensive literature study related to Arabic language education, learning technology, and Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy of education (Kivunja, & Kuyini, 2017) The literature data were then processed and analyzed systematically through a content analysis approach with clear stages, namely, a) data reduction, in which the researcher selects and focuses only on information that is truly relevant and in accordance with the problem formulation, while data deemed irrelevant or redundant are carefully eliminated, b) data display, which involves presenting the reduced data in a structured, systematic, and easily understood form, for example through tables, thematic matrices, or conceptual diagrams, and c) the stage of verification and conclusion drawing, where all the presented findings are re-verified for validity, linked to underlying theories, and then their systemic relationships are drawn to produce robust, credible conclusions that contribute new insights to the development of Arabic language learning design based on Ki Hajar Dewantara's critical pedagogy in the current digital era (Krauss, 2005, Bibi et.al., 2022).

3) RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Ki Hajar Dewantara: The Life History and His Thoughts

Ki Hajar Dewantara was born on May 2, 1889, in Yogyakarta with the childhood name Raden Mas Soewardi Soerjaningrat. He came from the royal lineage of the Yogyakarta Palace. His father's name was Pangeran Soerjaningrat and his mother's name was Raden Ayu Sandiah. Since childhood, he had already shown extraordinary intelligence (Widiyarto & Purnomo, 2023) He received his education at ELS (Europese Lagere School), a primary school specifically for European and selected indigenous children. He then continued to STOVIA, a medical school for indigenous people. Unfortunately, he did not complete his education at STOVIA due to illness. Nevertheless, he continued to study independently. He mastered Dutch, English, and French well. His writing talent was already evident in his youth. He often wrote sharp articles in newspapers. His sense of nationalism

began to grow from a young age. He was aware of the injustices of Dutch colonialism. His childhood life in the royal environment strongly shaped his character. He later became one of the pioneers of Indonesia's national awakening (Anisa, 2023).

In 1913 Ki Hajar Dewantara wrote the famous article titled “Als Ik Een Nederlander Was” (Seandainya Aku Seorang Belanda) 'The article sharply criticized the plan to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Netherlands' independence from France. He considered that such a celebration was inappropriate to hold in the colonies. The article angered the colonial government. As a result, he was exiled to the Netherlands along with Douwes Dekker and Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo. The period of exile actually enriched his understanding of education. In the Netherlands, he studied the educational systems of Froebel, Montessori, and Tagore. He also met with figures from the world of progressive education. This experience greatly shaped his thought about education. After returning to Indonesia in 1918, he began to focus on the field of education. He left practical politics to dedicate himself to the education of the people. He began formulating a concept of liberating education. The spirit of struggle remained, but the path was now through education. He was convinced that education was the way to true independence (Widiyarto & Purnomo, 2023).

On July 3, 1922, he founded the Taman Siswa school in Yogyakarta. This school became a milestone in revolutionary national education. He changed his name to Ki Hajar Dewantara to be closer to the people. He created the motto “Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani”. That motto became a principle of educational leadership that remains well-known to this day. He introduced the caring 'among' system. Teachers are not rulers, but guides from behind, companions in the midst, and role models in front. Education must align with the nature of the times and the nature of life itself. Children must learn according to their natural disposition. He rejected education that is coercive and oppressive. Taman Siswa used Indonesian as the language of instruction. This was a form of resistance against colonial education that forced the use of Dutch. He wanted to create free individuals in both body and soul. For him, education was a process of liberating the spirit. Taman Siswa grew rapidly even though it was often hindered by the colonial government (Zuriatin et. al., 2021).

Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought was greatly influenced by the concepts of culture and humanity. He developed educational theories based on the philosophy of Pancasila before Pancasila was officially formulated. He emphasized the importance of the trilogy: family, school, and community as a unified

educational system. Education should not be separated from the nation's culture. He rejected education that severs cultural roots. Children must grow up with their own national identity. He also integrated art and aesthetic cultivation into education. Education is not only about intellectual development but also the cultivation of heart and physical abilities. He believed that education should foster a sense of national self-confidence. He often said, "Every person is a teacher, every home is a school." Education takes place throughout life. He wanted education that humanizes humans. The concept of independent learning, which is now popular, was actually formulated by him long ago. His ideas remain relevant to this era (Anisa, 2023).

Ki Hajar Dewantara passed away on April 26, 1959, in Yogyakarta. He was buried in Taman Wijaya Brata, Yogyakarta. His birthday, May 2, was designated as National Education Day. The title "Father of National Education" was conferred by the Indonesian government (Zuriatin et.al., 2021). His ideas continue to live on in Indonesian education. The principle of among is still taught in educational institutions. Taman Siswa remains active to this day as evidence of the steadfastness of his vision. He taught that education is the right of all children of the nation. He opposed all forms of discrimination in education. His legacy is the spirit of independent learning. He wanted Indonesian children to grow up with self-respect. He believed that a great nation is one that educates its people with love. Ki Hajar Dewantara is not just a historical figure. He is an everlasting example for every Indonesian educator. His ideas continue to inspire humanistic and liberating educational movements.

b. Arabic Language Learning Design in the Digital Era within the Critical Pedagogy of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Thought

Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts in the context of education, which in turn have practical implications for the design of Arabic language learning in the digital era, cannot be separated from three concepts, which in this case consist of the nature of human beings, the nature of times, and the among system. These three concepts can be described as follows:

1. The nature of human beings

The nature of human beings in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought can be understood as individual differences whose existence is an undeniable reality (Khotimah and Hudaidah, 2021). Individual differences among students learning Arabic are very apparent and must be carefully considered so that teaching does not apply a one-size-fits-all approach. Some students' brains grasp nahwu-sharaf

patterns more quickly (logical-mathematical type), enjoying complete i'rab tables and formulas, but they may get bored if there is too much memorization without logic. In addition, there are students who are stronger in listening and pronunciation (auditory-musical type), quickly mastering ashwat and imitating the Arabic accent just by frequently listening to Arabic podcasts. In addition to the two types mentioned above, there are students with a kinesthetic type who only understand when learning while moving, for example writing Arabic sentences on the blackboard, creating a mind map by rearranging randomly presented pieces of paper, or practicing conversation while walking around the classroom.

Humans are creations of Allah swt., with very dynamic differences even among twins. These differences are not only physical but much deeper, encompassing natural disposition (innate talents), temporal disposition (influences of the environment and era), multiple intelligences, interests, talents, learning styles, developmental pace, emotions, motivation, and even how a student interprets the world. These differences, which Ki Hajar Dewantara illustrated as human nature, are strongly emphasized to be considered in the learning process, such as in the selection of learning resources, use of learning media, application of learning activities, and others. The selection of learning resources should not be the same for all students. Some students understand faster through textbooks, some through folk tales, some through videos, and some through direct observation in nature. The use of learning media should be adjusted to the students' learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or a combination. Kinesthetic students will struggle if they are only required to listen to lectures, while visual students will have difficulty if there are no pictures or diagrams. Learning activities should be varied. Some students learn through group discussions, some through individual projects, some through games, some through field research, and some by writing poetry or composing songs. Everything should be tailored to the students' talents and interests (Suryana & Muhtar, 2022).

Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought emphasizes the principle of liberating students by giving them the widest possible space for their nature to develop naturally. The teacher is no longer the sole authority imposing their own way of learning, but rather a companion who sensitively recognizes the uniqueness of each student, then provides a diverse learning environment so that each student can grow according to their distinct nature. In other words, respecting individual differences is not merely a technical method, but a fundamental form of honoring the humanity of students. When teachers enforce uniformity on every student across various dimensions, it is certain that education as a space for

empowering students, both physically and psychologically, has lost its essence. In this context, education has metamorphosed into a narrow space that restricts students' creativity.

In the design of Arabic language learning in the digital era, the critical pedagogy of Ki Hajar Dewantara regarding the nature of human beings, which is responsive to individual differences, can be applied by viewing each student as a unique creation of Allah swt., and therefore should not be treated uniformly even within the same class. An Arabic language teacher no longer gives the same assignment to 30 students (for example, 'memorize 20 vocabulary words and complete the exercises on page 45'), but rather provides a varied digital learning space. Visual learners are given access to animated nahwu-sharf videos with moving and colored i'rab visualizations. Auditory students can listen to recordings of Arabic conversations along with explanations of vocabulary by a native speaker through interactive podcasts. Kinesthetic students are encouraged to create stop-motion animations or short Arabic dramas using Canva or CapCut applications, and then upload them to the class platform. Students who are slow at reading Arabic alphabets are still provided with gamified digital modules (such as Duolingo-style) that progress at their own pace, while proficient students are challenged to create blogs or vlogs in Arabic about Indonesian local wisdom. The teacher acts only as a facilitator, monitoring the learning management system dashboard (for example, Google Classroom or AI-integrated Moodle), and providing personalized feedback via voice notes or short videos according to the needs of each student (Suryana & Muhtar, 2022).

2. The nature of times

In Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought, the educational process will be optimal when there is an effort to emphasize a balance between preserving tradition and adopting various advancements. In this context, the sense of time that he proposed carries the meaning of an attitude of openness in accepting developments as a reality that cannot be ignored, including, in this context, the development of learning technology in the digital era (Khoir et. al., 2025) In Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought, the educational process will achieve optimal results only if we are able to maintain a dynamic balance between preserving the nation's cultural traditions and openly adopting all forms of progress from the times. This balance is clearly reflected in the principle of Tricenta (Pracenta, Andapenta, Amongpenta), which teaches to love the nation's identity, remain humble toward ancestral heritage, and at the same time be brave in taking the good things from other civilizations without losing one's own identity.

The concept of the nature of the times, often expressed by Ki Hajar Dewantara, carries a deep meaning. Each era has its own characteristics and rhythm of development that cannot be rejected or ignored. Rejecting the changes of the era means killing the life of one's own nation; conversely, blindly following the times also means losing cultural roots. Therefore, the attitude required is a wise openness, accepting the realities of development as inevitable, but still selecting and directing that development so that it aligns with the nature of the nation and the nature of the students. In today's digital era, learning technologies, ranging from online platforms, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, to various educational applications, are tangible manifestations of the nature of the times being experienced. According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, the educational process must not close itself off from this technology, as that would be equivalent to refusing to live in the present era (Tampa et.al., 2023). However, the adoption of technology must still be based on the principle that technology is not a replacement for teachers, nor is it the ultimate goal of education, but merely a tool that must be educated and directed to support students' independence, the strengthening of moral character, and the preservation of the nation's noble values. Thus, education in the digital era will continue to be education that humanizes individuals without isolating students from the reality they face.

In the design of Arabic language learning in the digital era, Ki Hajar Dewantara's critical pedagogy of thought related to the nature of time, marked by the acceleration of technology, artificial intelligence, and global connectivity, means that an Arabic teacher no longer relies solely on printed books and blackboards. Instead, they design a digital learning ecosystem that follows the latest technological developments. Students are invited to use AI-based applications such as ChatGPT, which have been fine-tuned with classical and contemporary Arabic corpora, to practice Arabic conversation 24 hours a day whenever they want; they can talk to bots that imitate Saudi, Egyptian, or other accents according to their choice. For *balaghah* and *i'rab*, students use augmented reality tools (for example, the "Arabiya AR" app) where, when the phone camera is pointed at classical texts, explanations of *harakat*, *i'rab*, and brief explanations appear directly in an interactive 3D form. Nahwu learning is carried out through adaptive gamification platforms such as Kahoot, Quizizz, or local AI-based applications that adjust the difficulty level in real-time according to the students' abilities (Sprenger & Schwaninger, 2021).

3. The among system

Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought on the among system is very relevant to apply in digital Arabic language learning because they still maintain the role of the teacher as the main role model (*ing ngarsa sung tuladha*), even though the class takes place through a screen. An Arabic teacher today is not only a conveyor of material but must also be a figure who demonstrates noble character, patience, and love for the Arabic language in every video post, live stream, or response in the study group. The principle of *ing madya mangun karsa* encourages teachers to inspire students by utilizing interactive features such as Kahoot quizzes, gamification, or a challenge of reading one juz in a week, which is shared on social media. Meanwhile, *tut wuri handayani* reminds us that technology should function as a support from behind, not replace the essence of personal guidance, so that students still feel spiritually accompanied even when learning remotely. Thus, the adoption of technology does not make Arabic learning merely an “ordinary online course,” but still carries the spirit of Arabic education that emphasizes manners, sensitivity of the heart, and the closeness between teacher and student. Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought serves as a safeguard to ensure that digital advancement does not erode the main substance of Arabic learning, which is to shape individuals who understand and deeply internalize the words of Allah swt. with full love. (Qomar, 2012).

From the perspective of critical pedagogy rooted in the thought of Ki Hajar Dewantara, the motto “*ing ngarsa sung tuladha, ing madya mangun karsa, tut wuri handayani*” is not merely a romantic slogan, but a sharp critique of authoritarian colonial education and today's digital education, which is often technocentric and displaces the humane role of teachers. In the digital era, when Arabic language learning is often reduced to cold interactions between students and apps, algorithms, or AI avatars, the presence of teachers with their exemplary conduct becomes even more crucial to guide students in understanding that technology is merely a tool that must still be controlled by humans with noble human values (Nayla, et.al., 2024). This example becomes a form of resistance against the culture of instant gratification in the digital era, where students are often tempted to memorize without understanding, or to use automatic translators without making an effort to understand the root of words and the beauty of *balaghah*. At the same time, when students are already “in the middle” of the process, for instance, working on an Arabic podcast project or discussing in a WhatsApp group, the teacher shifts position to become “*ing madya mangun karsa*,” that is, entering their circle to build enthusiasm and courage to speak. The teacher is no longer the sole source of knowledge but becomes

an encourager who brings the Arabic learning process to life. When students begin to become independent, teachers step back to adopt a “tut wuri handayani” approach by monitoring from an analytics dashboard, sending voice notes containing praise and gentle corrections, or sending motivational verses in the middle of the night when the data shows that students are still practicing vocabulary at 1 a.m. In this way, technology does not replace, but rather expands the scope of action for these three teacher roles, so that learning Arabic remains a process of liberating the soul, not merely a transfer of linguistic data (Qomar, 2012).

4) CONCLUSIONS

Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought on the nature of human beings, the nature of times, and the among system emphasizes that learning Arabic in the digital era must be based on an absolute recognition of the uniqueness of each student as a creation of Allah swt., which is never identical. Individual differences in learning styles, pace, interests, and multiple intelligences demand a learning design that is no longer uniform, but rather provides diverse paths and digital media that liberate the nature of the students. At the same time, the nature of times, marked by technological revolutions and artificial intelligence, must be accepted openly and wisely as an inevitability of the era, yet still selected carefully so that it does not erode values of manners and ethics. The among system with the trilogy of guiding principles by showing an example in the front (*ing ngarsa sung tuladha*), providing an encouragement in the middle (*ing madya mangun karsa*), and supporting a motivation from behind (*tut wuri handayani*) serves as the main guard to ensure that technology does not replace the teacher's role as a model, motivator, and soul companion. Thus, learning Arabic no longer becomes a mechanistic process of knowledge transfer, but a space for liberating human nature and humanizing individuals. Digital technology becomes a learning environment arranged to empower the potential of each student. This overall approach makes Arabic learning in the digital era a tangible form of resistance against all forms of structured oppression in learning, as well as a manifestation of the highest respect for the will of Allah swt., who created humans with unparalleled uniqueness.

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