

Character Education Values in Ki Hajar Dewantara's Praxis Concept among Generation Z Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the character education values embedded in Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational praxis and their relevance to Generation Z students in higher education in the digital era. A mixed-methods approach with a sequential exploratory design was employed. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with students and lecturers from six study programs in the Faculty of Education, while quantitative data were obtained through questionnaires distributed to Generation Z students. Qualitative data were analyzed using NVivo through thematic coding, and quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings reveal that Generation Z students internalize key character values, including leadership, discipline, social awareness, mutual cooperation, and the Trikon principles of continuity, convergence, and concentricity. Quantitative results show that 51.1% of respondents identified Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo as the most influential value, 44.1% perceived lecturer discipline as the strongest form of role modelling, and 38% regarded collaborative group work as the primary contributor to character development. The findings indicate that lecturer exemplarity, collaborative learning environments, and the integration of local cultural values play significant roles in strengthening student character. This study contributes empirical evidence on the continued relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's indigenous educational philosophy and demonstrates that character internalization among Generation Z is shaped by the interaction of role modelling, collaborative learning, cultural identity, and contextual educational experiences.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technology has significantly transformed the learning experiences, social interactions, and value systems of Generation Z students. As digital natives, Generation Z is characterized by high technological proficiency, flexible learning preferences, and extensive engagement with online environments (Cain et al., 2022; Wajdi et al., 2024). While these characteristics provide opportunities for innovation and self-directed learning, recent studies have also reported challenges related to declining face-to-face interaction, reduced social engagement, weakened discipline, and increasing individualistic tendencies among young people (Hammad, 2025; Zaidi, 2024). These concerns have intensified discussions regarding the need for character education that remains relevant in the digital era.

Character education has become a global educational priority due to its role in fostering responsible citizenship, ethical behaviour, and social responsibility among students (Abirami, 2025). In higher education, character formation is increasingly viewed as an essential complement to academic achievement, particularly in preparing students to navigate complex social and technological environments. However, contemporary character education initiatives often rely on universal frameworks that pay limited attention to local cultural and philosophical traditions. Consequently,

scholars have called for greater integration of indigenous educational philosophies to strengthen character development within specific socio-cultural contexts.

In Indonesia, the educational philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara offers a culturally grounded framework for character formation. His educational praxis emphasizes the principles of Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo, Ing Madya Mangun Karso, and Tut Wuri Handayani, which promote exemplary leadership, collaborative engagement, and supportive guidance. Furthermore, the Trikon principles continuity, convergence, and concentricity highlight the importance of preserving local cultural values while selectively engaging with global influences (Kurniansyah et al., 2023). These principles provide a potential framework for addressing contemporary challenges faced by Generation Z students by balancing cultural identity, social responsibility, and adaptability to change.

Recent studies have examined Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational thought in various contexts. Previous research has explored the implementation of Trikon principles in elementary education (Narimawati et al., 2024), character education through digital media platforms (Herak, 2025) , and philosophical interpretations of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational values (RAHAYUNINGSIH, 2022; Solehah et al., 2020). Other studies have discussed character education challenges in the digital era (Fuadi et al., 2025; Winarti & Alimansur, 2025). Nevertheless, most existing research focuses on primary and secondary education, while empirical investigations involving university students remain limited. More importantly, little is known about how Generation Z students internalize Ki Hajar Dewantara's character values and perceive their relevance within contemporary higher education settings.

This gap is significant because higher education institutions are increasingly expected to cultivate not only academic competencies but also character attributes that enable students to navigate the social and ethical challenges of the digital age. Understanding how indigenous educational values are interpreted and practiced by Generation Z students may provide valuable insights for developing culturally responsive character education models in universities.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) What character education values derived from Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational praxis are internalized by Generation Z students?, 2) How do Generation Z students interpret and experience these values within higher education contexts? , 3) To what extent are Ki Hajar Dewantara's character education principles relevant for character formation in the digital era?.

This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy in contemporary higher education. It extends current discussions on character education by examining how indigenous educational values are internalized by Generation Z students and how these values can support character development in increasingly digitalized learning environments.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a Mixed Method approach with a Sequential Exploratory design. This design was chosen because the research starts from qualitative exploration to understand the meaning, experiences, and interpretations of Generation Z students

regarding character education values in Ki Hajar Dewantara's praxis concept, then reinforced with quantitative data through questionnaires to obtain a broader overview and ensure consistency of findings. This approach allows researchers to combine the strengths of in-depth qualitative data with measurable quantitative data, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding (Cresswell, 2018) (Garip S.2025).

In the qualitative phase, the researchers served as the primary instruments for data collection and interpretation. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews, facilitated participant engagement, and maintained reflective field notes throughout the research process. To minimize potential bias, interview protocols were developed prior to data collection, member checking was conducted with selected participants, and coding results were discussed among the research team to enhance credibility and consistency. The researchers had no direct supervisory or evaluative authority over the participants, thereby reducing the possibility of coercion or response bias.

This study adhered to established ethical principles for research involving human participants. Prior to participation, all respondents received information regarding the objectives of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection commenced. Participant identities were anonymized during transcription, analysis, and reporting to ensure confidentiality and privacy.

Research Subjects

The subjects in this study were Generation Z students who were studying at universities, with the main criteria being born between 1997- 2012, actively participating in academic and organizational activities, and willing to be research informants. In addition to students, this study also involved lecturers as subjects to obtain a broader perspective on the implementation of character education values.

The research subjects came from six study programs in the Faculty of Education, namely Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD), Early Childhood Education Teacher Education (PGPAUD), Non-Formal Education (PLS), Guidance and Counseling (BK), Educational Technology (TP), and Educational Management (MP). To obtain comprehensive data, the researcher used purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of informants based on certain considerations in accordance with the research needs (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2023). These considerations included the diversity of study program backgrounds, the level of involvement in campus organizations, and the students' experience in internalizing character values.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and questionnaire distribution. In-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured guidelines to explore the experiences, understanding, and interpretations of students and lecturers regarding character education values in Ki Hajar Dewantara's praxis concept. This technique was chosen because it was able to capture the meaning and critical reflections of the informants in greater depth. In addition, a Likert scale questionnaire was distributed to Generation Z students to measure their level of understanding, attitudes, and perceptions of character education values. The questionnaire aimed to broaden the scope of data and validate the findings obtained from the interviews, thereby producing a more comprehensive picture.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed by integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative data from the interview results were transcribed and then analyzed using NVivo software through the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to find patterns and main themes related to the internalization of character education values. Meanwhile, quantitative data obtained from questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics to see the trends in respondents' answers in the form of percentages, frequencies, and averages. The results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses were then combined (data integration) to obtain a more comprehensive and holistic understanding (Saunders P.2025) of the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's praxis concept in shaping the character of Generation Z students in the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A. Qualitative Findings: Internalization of Character Education Values

Character is a fundamental aspect in shaping students' personalities, particularly among Generation Z who live in a digital, dynamic environment with strong global influences. The internalization of character education values is not only reflected in cognitive aspects, but also in students' attitudes, behaviors, and everyday social interactions. Referring to Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy, leadership, discipline, social awareness, and the Trikon principles (continuity, convergence, concentricity) serve as essential foundations for developing a generation that is both rooted in character and adaptive to the changing times.

The qualitative findings obtained from in-depth interviews with students and lecturers illustrate how these values are understood, interpreted, and practiced in academic as well as organizational life. The data show that the internalization process occurs through direct experiences, social interactions, and role models provided by lecturers and the campus environment. The following findings are presented according to the main aspects that reflect the implementation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's character education values among Generation Z students.

1. Leadership of Generation Z Students

Based on the interview results, Generation Z students interpret Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership values as important guidelines in academic and organizational life. The motto "ing ngarso sung tulodo, ing madya mangun karso, tut wuri handayani" is understood as a principle that is relevant for setting an example, fostering mutual motivation, and providing support to others. In addition, students also emphasize the importance of building a spirit of togetherness in group activities. The findings are shown in Table 1 below.

As shown in Table 1, students associate leadership with understanding Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy, acting as role models, and fostering collaboration. These findings suggest that leadership among Generation Z is developed through social interaction and active participation rather than hierarchical authority. Leadership values are internalized through academic and organizational experiences, enabling students to practice responsibility, cooperation, and social awareness in authentic contexts.

Table 1. Generation Z Student Leadership in the Perspective of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Values

Aspects	Student Statement
Understanding Ki Hajar Dewantara's motto	Students understand the motto "ing ngarso sung tulodo, ing madya mangun karso, tut wuri handayani" as a leadership guideline.
Students as role models	As group leaders, students strive to set a good example for other members.
Spirit of togetherness	Students consider it important to build a spirit of togetherness in completing group assignments.

2. Discipline in Lectures

The interview results show that discipline is one of the important character values internalized by students during the lecture process. The responsibilities given to students, such as becoming class representatives (PJ), encourage the development of a disciplined attitude in conveying information and managing lectures. In addition, students emphasize the importance of academic honesty by avoiding plagiarism and viewing lecturers as role models in upholding discipline. An overview of these findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Discipline of Generation Z Students in Lectures

Aspects	Student Statement
Responsibility as a class representative (CR)	Students who serve as class representatives feel obligated to be disciplined in conveying information and assignments from instructors to their classmates.
Discipline in completing assignments without plagiarism	Students emphasize the importance of academic integrity by completing assignments independently without copying and pasting.
The role of lecturers as role models of discipline	Lecturers are seen as role models of discipline, both in terms of punctuality and in providing consistent guidance to students.

Table 2 shows that students' discipline values are formed through direct experience in the classroom and from examples set by lecturers. Discipline is reflected in several key aspects. First, the responsibility inherent in the role of students as class representatives (PJ) requires them to be disciplined in conveying information, managing the course, and ensuring smooth communication between lecturers and students. This shows that discipline is not only limited to personal aspects but also involves social responsibility in an academic context. Discipline is also evident in students' attitudes toward completing assignments. They emphasize the importance of avoiding plagiarism by doing their assignments independently. Academic honesty is considered a form of intellectual discipline that not only maintains personal integrity but also the quality of learning outcomes. This attitude shows an awareness that discipline is closely related to academic ethics. Overall, it is clear that the discipline of Generation Z students is the result of a combination of practical experience on campus, the application of academic ethics, and the example set by lecturers. This shows that discipline cannot be formed instantly, but rather through a process of habit formation, reinforcement of values, and support from a consistent learning environment.

3. Social Awareness and Mutual Cooperation

The interview results show that Generation Z students view the values of social awareness and mutual cooperation as important aspects that support academic success and social interaction on campus. Group work activities are considered a forum for

training solidarity, togetherness, and shared responsibility. In addition, students emphasized the importance of caring for one another, for example by providing support to friends experiencing academic difficulties. Discussions are also seen as a medium for building empathy, understanding different points of view, and broadening horizons. An overview of these findings can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Social Care and Cooperation Among Generation Z Students

Aspects	Student Statement
Collaboration in group tasks	Students feel a sense of togetherness through group work that encourages mutual assistance in completing assignments.
Concern for friends	Students show concern by supporting friends who are experiencing difficulties so that they remain enthusiastic about attending lectures.
The role of discussion in understanding differences	Discussions are seen as an effective means of understanding various perspectives and fostering empathy among students.

Table 3 shows that social care and mutual cooperation are important values that students internalize in their academic life. Group assignments foster a sense of togetherness while training collective responsibility. Caring is also evident when students provide moral support to friends who experience obstacles in their studies, demonstrating solidarity among them. In addition, discussions become a forum for developing empathy and openness, because through the exchange of ideas, students can learn to understand different points of view. Thus, social awareness and mutual cooperation not only strengthen relationships between individuals, but also create an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

4. Interpretation of Trikon (Continuity, Convergence, Concentricity)

Based on the interview results, Generation Z students understand Ki Hajar Dewantara's Trikon principle as an important foundation in character education. Although not all students know the term Trikon theoretically, they are able to provide concrete examples that illustrate continuity, convergence, and concentricity in academic life. Students emphasize the close relationship between culture and education, the need for openness to global influences with a selective attitude, and the importance of making local culture the primary identity. These findings are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Generation Z Students' Interpretation of the Trikon Principle

Aspects	Student Statement
Continuity	Education and culture are interconnected; for example, traditional games are modified in learning to suit children's development.
Convergence	Students consider it important to be open to global influences, but must be selective so that only positive cultures are adopted.
Concentricity	Local culture is seen as the center of education and national identity, so students need to uphold local values amid the tide of globalization.

Table 4 shows that students interpret the Trikon principle as a guide to maintaining a balance between local and global cultures in education. Continuity is reflected in efforts to preserve culture through learning, such as adapting traditional games to a modern context. Convergence is understood as the need to be open to new values from outside, but with a selective attitude so as not to erode national identity. Concentricity is emphasized by students as an affirmation that local culture must be the main axis in character building, even though they live in a digital era full of global influences. This shows that Generation Z students are aware of the need to maintain cultural identity while being able to adapt to the times.

5. Results of NVivo Internalization of Character Education Values

Before presenting the NVivo analysis results, it should be emphasized that the qualitative data were examined through the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify recurring patterns and meaningful themes from student and lecturer interviews. This process enabled the researcher to map how Generation Z students understand and internalize Ki Hajar Dewantara's character education values within the context of campus life. The results of the NVivo analysis are presented in Figure 1 and Table 6.

Table 6. NVivo Thematic Matrix of Character Education Value Internalization

Higher-Order Theme	Sub-Themes	Evidence from Participants	Interpretation
Leadership and Role Modelling	<i>Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo</i> , motivation, guidance	Students perceive lecturers and student leaders as role models in academic and organizational settings	Character values are transmitted through exemplary behaviour and social influence
Self-Regulation and Discipline	Responsibility, punctuality, academic integrity	Students emphasize completing tasks independently and avoiding plagiarism	Discipline is internalized as self-regulation rather than external control
Collaborative Engagement	Cooperation, empathy, peer support	Group discussions and collaborative projects strengthen solidarity and social responsibility	Character develops through meaningful social interaction
Cultural Identity Formation	Continuity, convergence, concentricity	Students maintain local values while selectively adopting global influences	Trikon functions as a framework for balancing local identity and globalization
Character Education Ecosystem	Family, campus, community	Character values are reinforced across multiple educational environments	Character formation is a collective and contextual process
Digital Era Challenges	Social media influence, individualism	Students experience difficulties applying values consistently in digital environments	Character education requires adaptive and contextual strategies

Table 6 presents the NVivo thematic matrix summarizing the internalization of Ki Hajar Dewantara's character education values among Generation Z students. The analysis identified four major themes: leadership and role modelling, self-regulation and discipline, collaborative engagement, and cultural identity formation through the Trikon principles. These themes indicate that character development is shaped through social interaction, academic experiences, and cultural engagement. The findings further highlight the importance of lecturer exemplarity, collaborative learning, and local cultural values in fostering character formation within higher education

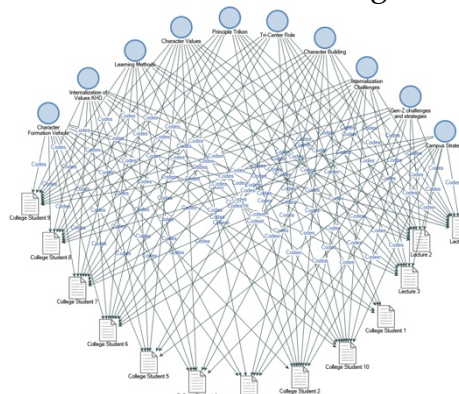


Figure 1. NVivo analysis of Generation Z students' internalization of Ki Hajar Dewantara's character education values

Figure 1 illustrates the NVivo analysis identified four interconnected higher-order themes underlying the internalization of Ki Hajar Dewantara's character education values among Generation Z students: (1) leadership and role modelling, (2) self-regulation and discipline, (3) collaborative engagement, and (4) cultural identity formation through the Trikon principles. These themes were reinforced through interactions within the family, campus, and community environments, reflecting Ki Hajar Dewantara's concept of the Three Centers of Education. The analysis further revealed that lecturer exemplarity, collaborative learning activities, and cultural experiences function as the primary mechanisms through which character values are internalized. Although students demonstrated a strong understanding of these values, challenges related to digital culture, social media influence, and individualistic tendencies were identified as barriers to their consistent implementation. Overall, the findings suggest that character development among Generation Z is shaped by the dynamic interaction between role modelling, self-regulation, social participation, and cultural identity within contemporary higher education contexts.

B. Quantitative: Student Perceptions through Questionnaires

To complement the qualitative data, a quantitative survey was conducted to examine students' perceptions of the internalization of Ki Hajar Dewantara's character education values. The questionnaire was distributed to respondents and analyzed descriptively to determine the level of understanding, the perceived role of lecturers as role models, and the influence of the academic environment and local culture. The results provide numerical evidence that supports and reinforces the interview findings, offering a more comprehensive picture of how Generation Z students conceptualize and practice character education within the campus context.

1. Level of Understanding of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Character Values

The results of the questionnaire analysis show that students have a good level of understanding of Ki Hajar Dewantara's character values, especially the motto "ing ngarso sung tulodo, ing madya mangun karso, tut wuri handayani". The majority of respondents gave scores of agree and strongly agree, indicating that conceptually students understand the importance of leadership, togetherness, and positive encouragement in academic and social life. To clarify the picture, a bar chart was created showing the average scores of students' understanding of each of Ki Hajar Dewantara's values.

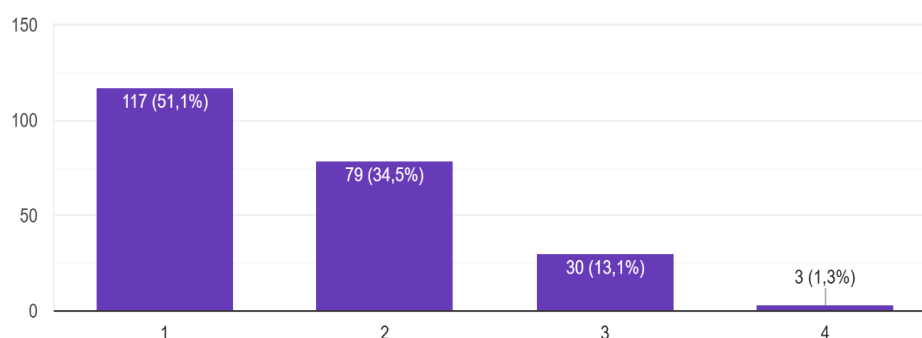


Figure 2. Average Student Understanding of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Values

Figure 2 shows that the majority of students (117 people or 51.1%) chose the value "Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo" as the most important aspect. This indicates that more than half of the respondents are very aware of the importance of being a role model in academic and social life. Furthermore, 79 students (34.5%) placed "Ing Madya Mangun Karso" in second place, showing great appreciation for the role of building motivation and a spirit of togetherness. Meanwhile, 30 students (13.1%) rated "Tut Wuri Handayani" as the main value, which still reflects a good understanding even though the number is lower than the previous two values. As for 3 students (1.3%), they gave other assessments, indicating a slight variation in views. Overall, these findings indicate that students conceptually understand Ki Hajar Dewantara's leadership motto and consider it relevant as a guideline in lectures and organizational life.

2. The Role of Lecturers as Role Models

In addition to conceptual understanding, the questionnaire results also show how students assess the role of lecturers in internalizing Ki Hajar Dewantara's character values. The majority of respondents agreed that lecturers serve as role models, particularly in terms of discipline, firmness, and consistency. This shows that the exemplary behavior of lecturers not only influences students' academic behavior but also shapes their social attitudes. To clarify the picture, a bar chart was created showing the average student scores for the role of lecturers as role models in character education.

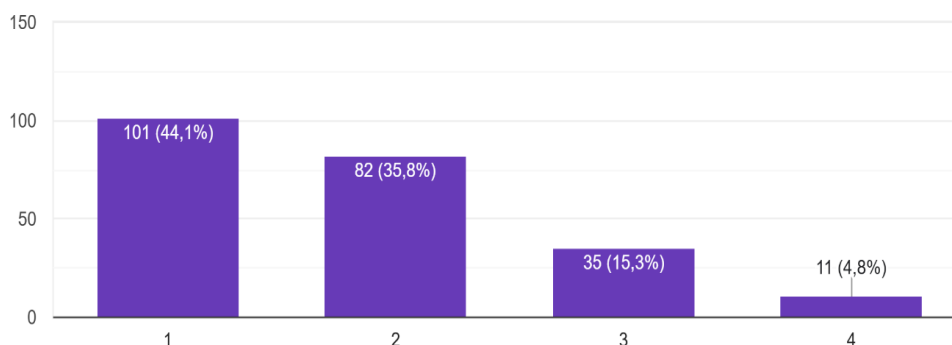


Figure 3. Average Student Assessment of the Role of Lecturers as Role Models

Figure 3 shows that 101 students (44.1%) rated punctuality and setting a positive example as the most prominent indicators. Furthermore, 82 students (35.8%) emphasized the importance of lecturers in providing motivation and guidance, which is also in the good category. Meanwhile, 35 students (15.3%) considered the role of lecturers in encouraging responsibility to be quite important, although the proportion was smaller than the two previous aspects. Eleven students (4.8%) gave other assessments, although the number was relatively small. These findings generally confirm that the role of lecturers as role models is considered very important by the majority of students in internalizing character education values. This shows that character building is not only transferred through theory but also through real examples in daily interactions in the classroom and academic environment.

3. Academic Environment and Local Culture

The questionnaire results show that the academic environment, particularly lecture activities such as class discussions, group work, and field projects, are considered by students to contribute significantly to character building. In addition, most students

agreed that the integration of local culture in learning activities can strengthen identity while maintaining the sustainability of the nation's noble values. To clarify the results, a bar chart was created showing the average scores of students' perceptions of the role of the academic environment and local culture in supporting character education.

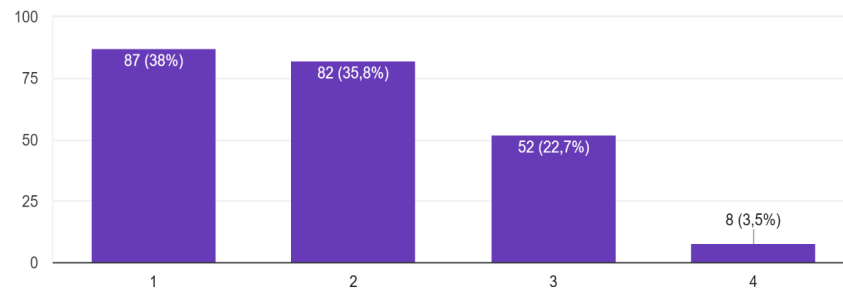


Figure 4. Average Student Perceptions of the Role of the Academic Environment and Local Culture

Figure 4 shows that 87 students (38%) consider group work to be the most dominant factor in character building, especially in fostering responsibility and cooperation. Furthermore, 82 students (35.8%) placed class discussions in second place, indicating that direct academic interaction contributes significantly to training awareness and openness. Meanwhile, 52 students (22.7%) emphasized the importance of integrating local culture into learning, indicating students' appreciation for efforts to preserve cultural values amid globalization. As for 8 students (3.5%), they gave other assessments, although the number was relatively small. In general, these findings show that a collaborative academic environment and the utilization of local culture in learning have a strategic role in strengthening the internalization of character education in Generation Z students.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Ki Hajar Dewantara's character education values remain highly relevant for Generation Z students despite the profound transformations brought about by digitalization and globalization. More importantly, the results suggest that character internalization among Generation Z is not primarily achieved through direct moral instruction but through meaningful experiences, social interaction, role modelling, and participation in collaborative learning environments. This finding supports contemporary perspectives on character development, which emphasize that character is constructed through social practice rather than merely transmitted as abstract knowledge (Siswanti, 2025; Wijayanti et al., 2025).

One of the most significant findings concerns the continued relevance of Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo, Ing Madya Mangun Karso, and Tut Wuri Handayani as leadership principles. Students perceived leadership not as authority or control but as the capacity to model positive behaviour, motivate peers, and foster collective engagement. This interpretation aligns closely with Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals acquire values and behaviours through observation and interaction with significant role models (Galario et al., 2025; Gebauer et al., 2021). In contemporary higher education, lecturers serve not only as knowledge transmitters but also as moral exemplars whose attitudes, consistency, and integrity influence students' character development. Similar findings have been reported in international studies showing that authentic leadership

and positive role modelling significantly contribute to students' ethical behaviour and civic responsibility (Fandir & Nurfidah, 2025; Zega, 2025). Therefore, the effectiveness of character education depends not only on curriculum content but also on the quality of interpersonal relationships within the learning environment.

The findings further reveal that discipline is internalized as a form of self-regulation rather than simple compliance with institutional rules. Students associated discipline with responsibility, academic integrity, punctuality, and accountability for their own learning. This finding reflects contemporary youth development theories that emphasize self-regulation as a critical competence for success in complex and technology-rich environments ((Linver et al., 2022). Generation Z learners tend to respond more positively to autonomy-supportive environments where discipline is linked to personal meaning and responsibility rather than external control. This observation is consistent with recent studies demonstrating that self-regulated learning skills are strongly associated with academic achievement, ethical decision-making, and long-term character development among university students (Kim & Ryoo, 2025; Paethrangsi et al., 2024). Consequently, discipline should be understood as an internalized character strength rather than merely adherence to institutional regulations.

Another important finding concerns the role of social awareness and cooperation in character formation. Students consistently identified group discussions, collaborative projects, and peer support as important contexts for developing empathy, solidarity, and responsibility. This finding corresponds with the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, which highlights competence, connection, confidence, character, and caring as interconnected dimensions of healthy youth development (Haritha & Bilquis, 2022). Collaborative learning environments provide opportunities for students to practice these competencies through authentic social interaction. Recent international studies similarly report that teamwork, peer engagement, and community participation strengthen empathy, intercultural understanding, and civic engagement among university students (Shamseddinpour, 2021). Therefore, social awareness should not be viewed merely as an individual virtue but as a socially constructed outcome emerging from meaningful participation in learning communities.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study lies in the interpretation of Ki Hajar Dewantara's Trikon principles within the context of Generation Z. The findings indicate that students do not perceive local culture and global influences as opposing forces. Instead, they seek to balance cultural preservation with openness to innovation and global knowledge. This interpretation resonates with contemporary discussions on global citizenship education, which emphasize the importance of maintaining cultural identity while developing intercultural competence and global awareness (A. Durango & L. Colorada, 2025). In this regard, continuity preserves cultural heritage, convergence facilitates selective engagement with external influences, and concentricity ensures that local values remain the foundation of identity formation. These findings suggest that the Trikon principles represent an indigenous framework for balancing globalization and cultural rootedness, thereby extending current debates on culturally responsive character education.

Nevertheless, the study also reveals a persistent gap between value awareness and value enactment. Although students demonstrated a strong conceptual understanding of leadership, discipline, cooperation, and cultural identity, they acknowledged

challenges in consistently applying these values within digitally mediated environments. The influence of social media, instant gratification, algorithm-driven content consumption, and global popular culture often encourages individualistic behaviour and reduces opportunities for reflective social engagement. Similar concerns have been documented in recent international studies showing that excessive digital engagement may weaken empathy, self-control, and social connectedness despite increasing access to information and communication (Prasai, 2024). These findings highlight the complexity of character development among digital-native generations and suggest that character education must move beyond knowledge transmission toward experiential and contextual learning approaches.

Taken together, the findings support the development of a Character Internalization Framework for Generation Z, consisting of four interconnected dimensions: role modelling, self-regulation, collaborative engagement, and cultural identity formation. These dimensions interact dynamically within the educational ecosystem of family, university, and community, while simultaneously responding to the challenges of digitalization and globalization. This framework extends existing character education literature by demonstrating how an indigenous educational philosophy can remain relevant within contemporary higher education contexts. Rather than functioning solely as a historical pedagogical doctrine, Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational praxis emerges as a culturally grounded and globally relevant framework for character formation in the twenty-first century

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Ki Hajar Dewantara's character education values remain relevant for Generation Z students in higher education. Students internalize leadership, discipline, social awareness, mutual cooperation, and the Trikon principles through role modelling, collaborative learning, and cultural experiences. The findings indicate that character development is shaped by the interaction of role modelling, self-regulation, collaborative engagement, and cultural identity formation.

This study contributes to character education literature by demonstrating that indigenous educational values can serve as a framework for developing culturally grounded yet globally adaptive students. Practically, higher education institutions should strengthen lecturer exemplarity, collaborative learning, community engagement, and the integration of local wisdom into curricula. The proposed Character Internalization Framework highlights four key dimensions: role modelling, self-regulation, collaborative engagement, and cultural identity formation.

The study was limited to a single faculty context, reducing the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the quantitative analysis relied on descriptive statistics and self-reported perceptions, which may not fully capture actual character-related behaviours.

Future studies should examine the proposed framework across diverse institutional and cultural settings using longitudinal designs or advanced statistical techniques. Further research is also needed to explore how digital learning environments and emerging technologies can be integrated with Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy to strengthen character development among future generations.

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