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Educational convergence of Dewantara's philosophy and Singapore competencies

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the convergence of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's humanistic educational philosophy and Singapore's 21st century competencies (21CC) framework within contemporary educational reforms. Although competency-based reforms and indigenous humanistic philosophy are frequently treated as opposing paradigms, comparative education research has rarely examined how they converge across pedagogy, character formation, and educational ecosystems in the Southeast Asian context, leaving this relationship insufficiently understood. Using a qualitative comparative document analysis, the study analyzed 24 philosophical texts, policy documents, and scholarly sources related to Dewantara's educational thought and Singapore's competency-based education policies. Data were analyzed through deductive and inductive thematic coding and cross-case comparison across three dimensions: educational purpose, pedagogical orientation, and educational ecosystems. The findings reveal convergence in three major areas: i) the transformation of teachers' roles from instructional authorities to learning facilitators; ii) the positioning of character education as the ethical foundation of 21CC; and iii) the development of collaborative educational ecosystems involving schools, families, and communities, although important differences remain in historical orientation and policy implementation. This study contributes a conceptual framework of educational convergence that is distinguished from prior comparative work and offers concrete implications for curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers seeking to integrate ethical formation and cultural identity within competency-based education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education systems are undergoing profound transformation in response to globalization, rapid technological change, artificial intelligence, and the growing complexity of social life. Across many countries, educational reform has increasingly prioritized the development of 21st century competencies (21CC) such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, adaptability, and digital literacy [1]–[3]. Education is no longer understood merely as the transmission of academic knowledge, but as a process of preparing learners to navigate uncertainty, complexity, and continuous social transformation. Within this context, competency-based education has emerged as one of the dominant paradigms shaping global curriculum reform and educational policy [2], [4]. Simultaneously, the expansion of digital technologies and artificial intelligence has significantly altered how knowledge is produced, accessed, and interpreted within educational environments [5]–[7].

Despite their growing influence, competency-based educational reforms have generated substantial criticism. Scholars have argued that education systems increasingly shaped by economic competitiveness, performativity, and international benchmarking often prioritize measurable achievement and technical efficiency, while marginalizing the ethical formation, cultural rootedness, and broader human purposes of education [8]–[10]. Within increasingly technologized and data-driven societies, concerns have also emerged regarding declining empathy, weakened civic responsibility, and the reduction of education for workforce preparation and economic productivity [7], [11]. These tensions have encouraged renewed attention towards educational approaches that emphasize moral responsibility, social awareness, and holistic human development alongside cognitive and technological competence.

In this context, humanistic educational philosophy has regained its relevance in contemporary educational discourse. Humanistic approaches conceptualize education as a process of humanization integrating the intellectual, emotional, ethical, social, and cultural dimensions of learning [9], [10], [12]. Increasingly, scholars have argued that culturally grounded educational philosophies provide important perspectives for balancing global competency frameworks with local identity, ethical responsibility, and social sustainability [13]–[15]. Within comparative education discourse, non-Western and indigenous educational traditions are therefore receiving growing attention as alternative epistemological resources capable of enriching contemporary educational reform beyond purely technocratic orientations [16], [17].

One of the most influential humanistic educational philosophies in Southeast Asia is the educational thought of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, the founder of *Taman Siswa* and a central figure in Indonesian national education. Dewantara conceptualized education as a process of cultivating freedom, moral responsibility, cultural consciousness, and social harmony through holistic human development [18]–[20]. His educational philosophy, reflected in concepts such as the *Among System*, *Budi Pekerti*, *Tri Pusat Pendidikan*, and *Trikon*, emphasizes learner autonomy, ethical formation, and collaborative educational environments. Dewantara's pedagogical thought also rejects authoritarian models of education by positioning teachers as *Pamong* who guide learners through moral example, encouragement, and responsible mentorship. Although his philosophy emerged within the context of the anti-colonial struggle and cultural emancipation, many of its principles remain highly relevant to contemporary debates concerning learner-centered pedagogy, character education, culturally responsive teaching, and socially sustainable education systems [14], [15], [20].

Simultaneously, Singapore has emerged as one of the most influential examples of competency-based educational reform in Asia. Through initiatives such as the 21CC framework, character and citizenship education (CCE), and teach less and learn more (TLLM), Singapore has increasingly integrated learner-centered pedagogy, ethical development, and global competencies within national educational policy [21]–[23]. Although Singapore's education system is frequently associated with economic pragmatism and global competitiveness, contemporary reforms have demonstrated growing attention to value education, social cohesion, student well-being, and holistic human development [4], [24]. Singapore, therefore, represents an important example of how competency-based educational reform may incorporate ethical and humanistic dimensions alongside technological and economic priorities.

Previous scholarship has examined Dewantara's educational philosophy primarily within Indonesian educational discourse, especially in relation to nationalism, character education, moral formation, and cultural pedagogy [19], [20]. Meanwhile, studies on Singapore's education system have largely focused on educational governance, policy effectiveness, and competency development within global educational competition [22], [24]. However, limited research has comparatively examined the convergence between indigenous humanistic educational philosophy and contemporary competency-based educational reform in Southeast Asian contexts [16], [17]. Existing research has rarely explored how ethical formation, learner autonomy, and collaborative educational ecosystems intersect across these two educational paradigms. Consequently, the relationship between humanistic educational philosophy and competency-based educational reform remains insufficiently explored in comparative education discourse.

To address this gap, this study examines the convergence between Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy and Singapore's competency-based educational framework through comparative qualitative document analysis [16], [25]. This study specifically investigates convergence across three dimensions: pedagogical orientation, character formation, and educational ecosystems. By analyzing philosophical texts, educational policy documents, and contemporary comparative education scholarship, this study aims to demonstrate that humanistic educational philosophy and competency-based reform are not necessarily opposing paradigms, but may instead function as complementary approaches within future-oriented education.

Guided by this aim, the present study was directed by three research questions. First, to what extent do Dewantara's educational philosophy and Singapore's 21CC framework converge in their pedagogical orientation, particularly regarding the role of the teacher and the cultivation of learner autonomy? Second, how do these two paradigms position character and value formation in relation to competency development?

Third, in what ways do both paradigms conceptualize the educational ecosystem that links school, family, and community? The questions structured the comparative analysis, as presented in the following sections.

This study contributes to comparative education discourse in three important ways. First, it expands the discussion of Dewantara's educational thought beyond Indonesian education discourse by positioning it within broader international conversations on competency-based learning, humanistic pedagogy, and culturally responsive education. Second, it offers a comparative Southeast Asian perspective on the relationship between ethical formation and competency development in contemporary educational reforms. Third, the findings provide conceptual implications for developing educational models that integrate global competencies with culturally grounded, ethically oriented, and socially sustainable educational values [8], [12], [13].

Beyond comparing the two cases, this study advances comparative education theory by demonstrating that educational convergence should be evaluated through explicit analytical criteria rather than descriptive similarity. Therefore, the proposed criteria-based framework constitutes a methodological contribution as well as a substantive one: it offers a transferable approach for comparing culturally grounded educational philosophies with competency-based reforms across different national contexts, rather than a single comparison confined to Indonesia and Singapore [16], [26].

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by a humanistic perspective on education combined with a comparative education analytical lens. Drawing on Freire's [9] conception of education as a humanizing and dialogical practice, Noddings's [10] ethics of care, and Biesta's [8] argument that education serves the interdependent purposes of qualification, socialization, and subjectification [27], the analysis treats education as a process of forming free, ethical, and socially responsible persons rather than as the mere transmission of measurable skills. This humanistic lens informs the interpretation of both Dewantara's philosophy and Singapore's competency reforms, foregrounding the ethical and relational dimensions of learning alongside its cognitive and economic dimensions and shaping how the findings are read throughout the discussion.

To structure the cross-paradigm comparison, this study adopts the established principles of comparative education and policy borrowing [16], [17], which caution that educational ideas acquire different meanings as they are translated across cultural and institutional contexts. Within this framework, the two paradigms are compared across three analytical dimensions—educational purpose, pedagogical orientation, and educational ecosystem—and educational convergence is assessed using three explicit criteria: i) conceptual correspondence, referring to the shared underlying meaning of educational purpose and values; ii) functional equivalence, referring to the comparable roles that different concepts perform within each system; and iii) complementary orientation, referring to principles that are mutually compatible without being identical. Convergence, therefore, denotes complementarity rather than equivalence and is evaluated through these explicit analytical criteria rather than descriptive similarity, while remaining attentive to the distinct historical and political conditions in which each paradigm developed. This criterion-based, complementarity-oriented reading distinguishes the present analysis from earlier comparative studies of competency-based education or Dewantara's thought [26].

3. METHOD

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative comparative research design using document analysis to examine the convergence between Ki Hadjar Dewantara's humanistic educational philosophy and Singapore's 21CC framework. A qualitative comparative approach was selected because the study focused on interpreting philosophical ideas, educational values, and policy orientations across different educational contexts rather than measuring variables quantitatively. Comparative document analysis is widely used in comparative education research to analyze philosophical foundations, policy discourses, and educational reforms across national contexts [16], [17], [25]. Document analysis was considered the most appropriate method because this study aimed to systematically examine philosophical texts and educational policy frameworks without relying on participant-based data. This approach enabled an in-depth interpretation of educational concepts, pedagogical principles, and institutional orientations embedded within philosophical writings and policy documents [28], [29].

3.2. Data sources and selection criteria

The study analyzed 24 documents consisting of three categories of sources: i) seven primary philosophical texts by Ki Hadjar Dewantara; ii) six official Singapore education policy documents; and iii) 11 peer-reviewed international journal articles and scholarly policy references. The primary philosophical

sources included writings related to the *Among System*, *Panca Darma*, *Tri Pusat Pendidikan*, and the *Trikon* principles [18]–[20]. Policy documents included the 21CC framework, CCE, TLLM, and community partnership initiatives within Singapore's educational system [21], [23], [30]. In addition, peer-reviewed international scholarship and policy literature were used to contextualize and strengthen the comparative analysis [4], [22], [24], [31].

The documentary corpus was assembled purposively. Sources were included when they directly addressed the comparative question, offered substantive insight into humanistic or competency-oriented education, originated from credible scholarly or governmental channels, and provided sufficient conceptual content for cross-context analysis. To strengthen academic rigor, this study prioritized primary philosophical texts, official policy documents, and peer-reviewed international scholarship.

3.3. Data collection procedure

Data collection was conducted in four stages: document identification, screening, categorization, and close reading. Relevant philosophical texts, policy documents, and scholarly publications were initially identified using academic databases, official education ministry publications, books, and peer-reviewed journals. The documents were subsequently screened based on their relevance to the study's analytical focus on educational purpose, pedagogy, character formation, and educational ecosystems [16], [25]. Following the screening process, documents were categorized into philosophical, policy, and scholarly sources to facilitate systematic comparison across contexts. Each document then underwent close reading to identify recurring concepts, educational values, pedagogical orientations, and institutional frameworks relevant to the study objectives [25].

3.4. Data analysis

This study employed comparative thematic analysis and policy mapping to identify patterns of convergence between Dewantara's educational philosophy and Singapore's competency-based education framework, following established procedures in qualitative thematic analysis [32], [33]. Initially, a deductive coding process was conducted based on three predefined analytical dimensions derived from the research objectives and comparative education literature: i) educational purpose; ii) pedagogical orientation; and iii) educational ecosystem. Within these dimensions, key themes such as teacher roles, learner autonomy, character formation, social responsibility, and collaborative learning environments were systematically coded across the selected documents.

Inductive coding was applied through iterative reading to identify emerging themes and conceptual relationships that were not fully captured by the initial analytical framework. A cross-case comparison was conducted by systematically comparing the similarities and differences between Dewantara's philosophical principles and Singapore's competency-based policy orientations across the three analytical dimensions. The comparative analysis then mapped the areas of convergence and divergence across philosophical, pedagogical, ethical, and systemic dimensions. Finally, an interpretative analysis was conducted to examine how humanistic educational values are operationalized within contemporary competency-based educational policies.

To enhance methodological transparency, the coding process was conducted in three phases. During the generation phase, initial codes were attached to text segments expressing educational purposes, pedagogical roles, ethical and character-related values, and institutional relationships within each document. In the refinement phase, these initial codes were iteratively grouped, merged, and relabeled into candidate themes aligned with the three analytical dimensions and were recurrently checked against the source texts to ensure that they reflected the documentary evidence. In the validation phase, the resulting themes were re-examined across the full document set through cross-case comparisons, and ambiguous or discrepant passages were re-read and reconciled to confirm that each theme was consistently supported. The three analytical dimensions—educational purpose, pedagogical orientation, and educational ecosystem—were defined a priori from the research questions and comparative education literature, and therefore guided rather than emerging from the analysis [32], [33].

The analysis proceeded through four iterative stages. The first stage involved familiarization with the full corpus of philosophical and policy documents. The second stage applied deductive coding based on a predefined analytical framework of educational purpose, pedagogical orientation, and educational ecosystem. The third stage involved inductive refinement of emergent themes that were not fully captured by the initial framework. The fourth stage conducted a cross-case comparison, mapping each theme against the three convergence criteria—conceptual correspondence, functional equivalence, and complementary orientation—to determine the degree and form of convergence. This staged workflow was designed to make the analytical process reproducible and transparent [32], [33]. Table 1 presents illustrative examples of this coding and convergence-mapping process, showing how selected text excerpts were assigned initial codes, grouped into themes, and mapped onto the three convergence criteria.

Table 1. Illustrative examples of coding and convergence-mapping processes

Text excerpt (source)	Initial code	Theme	Convergence criterion
Tut Wuri Handayani (Dewantara)	Teacher supports from behind	Teacher role	Functional equivalence
TLLM (Singapore)	Facilitative pedagogy	Teacher role	Conceptual correspondence
Budi Pekerti (Dewantara)	Moral character formation	Character education	Conceptual correspondence
CCE (Singapore)	Values-based competency	Character education	Functional equivalence
Tri Pusat Pendidikan (Dewantara)	Family–school–community	Educational ecosystem	Complementary orientation
COMPASS (Singapore)	Community partnership	Educational ecosystem	Complementary orientation

3.5. Trustworthiness and validation

To enhance the credibility and dependability of the study, source triangulation was conducted by crosschecking philosophical texts, policy documents, and peer-reviewed literature. The use of multiple data sources enables a more comprehensive interpretation of the relationship between indigenous educational philosophy and contemporary competency frameworks [33], [34]. Analytical consistency was strengthened through iterative coding and repeated comparisons across documents to ensure coherence between the identified themes and interpretative conclusions. An audit trail was maintained throughout the analytical process by documenting the coding categories, thematic development, and comparative mapping procedures. These strategies were employed to minimize interpretative bias and strengthen the confirmability and transparency of the findings [34].

Because document analysis relies on researchers' interpretation of texts, reflexivity is treated as integral to trustworthiness. The authors acknowledge that their backgrounds in Islamic and humanistic education may incline the analysis towards ethical and character-oriented readings. To mitigate this, interpretations were anchored explicitly in the wording of the source documents, and disconfirming or divergent evidence, such as economic and state-driven rationales within Singapore's policies, was deliberately sought and reported rather than set aside. Document analysis was judged to be sufficient for the study's conceptual and policy-level objectives, because the comparison concerned articulated educational philosophies and official policy orientations, which are most authoritatively represented in published philosophical and policy texts. Nevertheless, this approach cannot capture enacted classroom practice; this limitation is discussed further and frames the agenda for future empirical research [25], [34].

3.6. Ethical considerations

The analysis drew exclusively on publicly accessible philosophical, policy, and scholarly documents. No participants were recruited and no private or confidential information was collected; institutional ethics approval was therefore not applicable to the research design. Nevertheless, the study maintained academic integrity through accurate citations, transparent analytical procedures, and responsible interpretations of all the sources used in the research. As a document-based qualitative study, the analysis focused on conceptual and policy convergence and did not include empirical classroom observations or participant perspectives.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Pedagogical, ethical, and ecological foundations in Dewantara's educational thought

Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy represents one of the most influential humanistic educational traditions in Southeast Asia, emphasizing education as a process of humanization rooted in culture, moral responsibility, and inner freedom [19], [20]. His philosophical framework continues to shape contemporary educational discourse in Indonesia, particularly in discussions concerning character education, learner autonomy, and culturally grounded pedagogy [14], [15]. Rather than positioning education solely as academic instruction, Dewantara conceptualized education as the holistic formation of individuals capable of developing ethical awareness, social responsibility, and cultural consciousness [18], [19], [35].

As the founder of *Taman Siswa*, Dewantara formulated *Panca Darma* as a normative framework guiding education towards the development of free and responsible individuals [18], [19]. The principles of independence, harmony with nature, cultural rootedness, national identity, and humanity articulate a holistic educational vision in which individuals develop in relation to the self, society, culture, and wider human community [18], [20], [35]. Within this framework, education functions not merely as knowledge transmission, but also as a process of cultural and moral formation aimed at cultivating responsible autonomy and social harmony [9], [10], [20].

Dewantara further asserted that national education should proceed "within the lines of civility and humanity" grounded in religious and moral values [18], [20]. This perspective indicates that his educational philosophy is not exclusively cultural in orientation but also ethical and religious-normative [19], [20].

Education, therefore, is directed towards the safety, dignity, and well-being of society while maintaining harmony between individual freedom and collective responsibility [18], [19].

Central to Dewantara's philosophy is the *Among System*, which positions teachers not as authoritarian transmitters of knowledge but as *Pamong* who guide learners in accordance with the child's nature and developmental potential [18], [19]. This pedagogical orientation is articulated through the trilogy of educational leadership: *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tulada* (leading by example), *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa* (fostering initiative and motivation), and *Tut Wuri Handayani* (supporting from behind to nurture independence) [18], [20]. Through these principles, teachers facilitate learner autonomy while maintaining ethical guidance and social responsibility [14], [19]. Dewantara's pedagogical model therefore critiques rigid and authoritarian forms of schooling that suppress creativity, reflective thinking, and moral development [9], [15].

In Dewantara's educational thought, freedom in learning does not imply unrestricted individualism, but freedom guided by values, responsibility, and social awareness. Consequently, teachers function not only as facilitators of learning but also as cultural agents responsible for cultivating ethical consciousness and civic character. This orientation anticipates contemporary learner-centered approaches that emphasize agency, reflective learning, and facilitative pedagogy within 21st-century educational discourse [1], [15], [24].

For Dewantara, *Budi Pekerti* (moral character formation) constitutes the core of education because character is inseparable from the process of humanization [20], [35], [36]. Character emerges through the integration of *Cipta* (thought), *Rasa* (feeling), and *Karsa* (will), forming a holistic personality that balances intellectual, emotional, ethical, and social dimensions [18], [19]. Education, therefore, cannot be reduced to cognitive achievement alone but must cultivate empathy, moral responsibility, and ethical judgement [8]–[10].

Character formation within Dewantara's framework is multidimensional, encompassing moral-ethical, socio-humanistic, spiritual, and aesthetic-cultural dimensions [18], [20], [35]. These values are not transmitted solely through formal instruction but are embodied through role modelling, school culture, and lived social experience [10], [36]. Dewantara also argued that the essential teachings of religions should inform moral education so that learners develop mutual respect, ethical awareness, and social harmony across cultural and religious differences [18], [19]. This perspective resonates with contemporary global scholarship on character education, which increasingly emphasizes ethical formation and social-emotional learning as essential dimensions of holistic education [4], [31], [36].

Dewantara further conceptualized education as a cultural ecosystem embedded within the totality of human experience [18], [19]. Through the concept of *Tri Pusat Pendidikan*—family, school, and community—he emphasized that human development occurs through the interaction of interconnected educational environments [18], [20]. These three centers must function collaboratively to ensure continuity of values, social responsibility, and meaningful learning experiences across everyday life [13], [31], [37].

To sustain ecological integration amidst social and historical changes, Dewantara articulated the *Trikon* principles of continuity, convergence, and concentricity [18]–[20]. These principles emphasize that education must preserve cultural continuity, remain open to global influences, and maintain cultural identity as its central orientation. Through this framework, education can absorb universal knowledge and modern developments without losing cultural rootedness and ethical orientation [13]–[15].

Collectively, Dewantara's educational philosophy reflects a holistic and humanistic orientation that integrates learner autonomy, ethical formation, and a collaborative educational environment. In contemporary comparative education discourse, these principles may be interpreted as an early articulation of culturally responsive and globally adaptive education, anticipating current debates on balancing global competencies with local identity [13]–[15]. These philosophical foundations provide an analytical basis for examining the points of convergence between Dewantara's educational thought and Singapore's competency-based educational framework, as discussed in the following section.

4.2. Singapore's education system: values-based global competencies

Singapore's education system is widely recognized as one of the most adaptive and strategically oriented education systems in Asia, particularly in responding to the demands of globalization, technological transformation, and knowledge-based economic development [4], [22], [24]. Over the past two decades, Singapore has gradually shifted from an efficiency-driven and examination-oriented model to a more student-centered and value-based educational approach that emphasizes holistic human development alongside academic achievement [22], [23].

This transformation is reflected in Singapore's 21CC framework, which seeks to cultivate confident individuals, self-directed learners, active contributors, and citizens of concern [21]. The framework integrates the cognitive, social, emotional, and ethical dimensions of learning, indicating that 21CC are understood not merely as technical or economic skills, but also as capacities connected to civic responsibility, social cohesion, and ethical judgement [4], [24], [21]. At the center of the framework are core values such as respect, responsibility, resilience, integrity, care, and harmony, which function as the moral foundation of competency development [21], [23]. These values are embedded within broader educational goals related to

global awareness, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and digital literacy [21], [24]. Singapore's competency-based education model attempts to balance economic competitiveness with social stability, multicultural coexistence, and national identity [4], [24], [30].

A significant aspect of Singapore's educational reform is its shift towards learner-centered pedagogy. Through initiatives such as TLLM, teachers are encouraged to move beyond content transmission and adopt facilitative roles that promote enquiry, reflective thinking, creativity, and self-directed learning [21], [22]. This pedagogical transformation reflects broader international trends towards active learning and learner agency in contemporary education [1], [24]. Simultaneously, the Singaporean model remains strongly structured through national policy direction and institutional coordination, illustrating the coexistence of pedagogical flexibility and state-guided educational governance [17], [22].

Singapore has also strengthened the ethical and civic dimensions of education through the CCE program, which integrates moral education, social-emotional learning, and responsible citizenship into formal schooling [21], [23]. Character education is therefore positioned not as a supplementary component but as an integral foundation for preparing learners to navigate multicultural societies, digital environments, and global interdependence. This orientation reflects the growing international recognition that future-ready competencies require ethical awareness and social responsibility in addition to academic and technological proficiency [4], [27], [36].

Beyond classroom pedagogy, Singapore's education system increasingly emphasizes collaborative educational ecosystems involving schools, families, and communities. Policies such as the community and parents in support of schools (COMPASS) initiative encourage parental engagement, community participation, and shared responsibility in supporting student development [21], [37]. Experiential learning, service learning, and community engagement programs further reinforce the connection between academic learning and social experience, positioning education as a broader societal process than an exclusively school-based activity [13], [30], [37].

The integration of digital technologies within Singapore's education system further illustrates the country's efforts to prepare learners for future uncertainty while maintaining ethical and social stability [5], [6]. Digital literacy, adaptability, and innovation are promoted alongside responsible digital citizenship and social harmony [21], [24]. This reflects the growing awareness that technological advancement without an ethical orientation may contribute to social fragmentation, individual alienation, and weakened civic responsibility [7], [8]. Although Singapore's education system is often associated with pragmatism and economic competitiveness, contemporary reforms increasingly emphasize a balance between performance-oriented policies and humanistic, value-based educational goals [22], [23]. Therefore, in comparative education discourse, Singapore represents an important example of how competency-based educational reform can incorporate ethical formation, learner well-being, and social cohesion within a globally competitive framework [16], [24].

Collectively, Singapore's educational reforms reflect an evolving model of value-based competency education that integrates learner-centered pedagogy, character formation, and collaborative educational ecosystems. These developments provide an important comparative context for examining the points of convergence between Singapore's policy framework and Dewantara's humanistic educational philosophy, particularly regarding the relationship between competencies, ethical development, and holistic education [8], [13], [30]. Figure 1 presents the conceptual convergence between Dewantara's educational philosophy and Singapore's competency-based educational framework across pedagogical, ethical, and ecological dimensions. The figure illustrates the conceptual convergence between Dewantara's humanistic educational philosophy and Singapore's 21CC framework across three interconnected dimensions: pedagogy, character formation, and educational ecosystems. The framework demonstrates how both paradigms contribute to the development of humanistic competency education oriented towards ethical, learner-centered, and socially sustainable educational transformation.

4.3. Convergence analysis: the *Among System* and Singapore's education framework

Drawing on comparative thematic analysis and cross-case policy mapping, this study identifies substantive convergence between Dewantara's humanistic educational philosophy and Singapore's competency-based educational framework across pedagogical, ethical, and systemic dimensions. Although the two paradigms have emerged from different historical and institutional contexts, both increasingly emphasize holistic human development, learner-centered pedagogy, character formation, and collaborative educational ecosystems. The analysis suggests that humanistic educational philosophy and competency-based reform are not necessarily opposing paradigms, but may function as complementary approaches within contemporary educational transformations [8], [13], [22]. Table 2 synthesizes the principal areas of convergence identified through comparative analysis and provides an analytical foundation for the following discussion. As illustrated in Table 2, convergence is evident across the three strategic domains that structure

the analysis: i) transformation of teacher roles; ii) positioning of character education as the ethical basis of competencies; and iii) development of collaborative educational ecosystems. At the same time, the analysis also reveals important contextual differences regarding historical orientation, institutional implementation, and policy priorities.

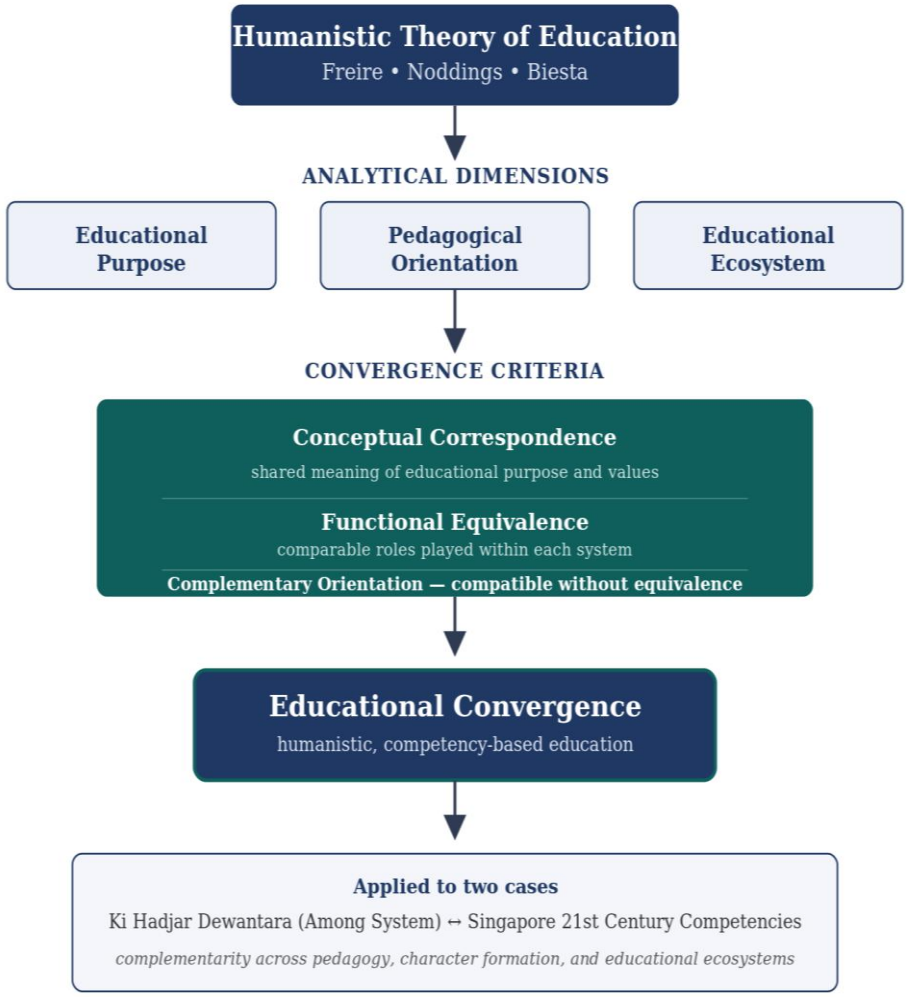


Figure 1. Analytical framework of educational convergence, comparing Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Among System and Singapore's 21CC framework across three convergence criteria

Table 2. Conceptual convergence between the *Among System* and Singapore's 21CC framework

Dimension	Ki Hadjar Dewantara (*Among System*)	Singapore education system (21CC)	Form of convergence
Educational purpose	Human flourishing and inner freedom	Confident persons and concerned citizens	Education oriented towards human well-being and social responsibility
Teacher role	*Pamong* (mentor and moral guide)	Facilitator and designer of learning	Shift towards facilitative and learner-centered pedagogy
Learning approach	Freedom aligned with the child's nature	Inquiry-based and self-directed learning	Learner autonomy and active learning
Character formation	*Budi Pekerti* integrating thought, feeling, and will	Core values and CCE	Character as the ethical foundation of competencies
Educational ecosystem	*Tri Pusat Pendidikan* (family, school, and community)	COMPASS and community partnerships	Collaborative educational ecosystems
Orientation to change	Adaptation to the demands of the times	Future-ready competencies and digital literacy	Responsiveness to global and technological change
Social orientation	Cultural harmony and national civilization	Social cohesion and multicultural citizenship	Education as a foundation for social sustainability

4.3.1. Reframing teacher roles: from instructional authority to facilitative pedagogy

These findings indicate that the transformation of teachers' roles constitutes one of the strongest points of convergence between Dewantara's educational philosophy and Singapore's contemporary educational reform. Dewantara conceptualized teachers as *Pamong* who guide learners through moral example, encouragement, and responsible mentorship rather than authoritarian instruction [18], [20]. Through the *Tut Wuri Handayani* principle, teachers support learners from behind, enabling the development of autonomy while maintaining ethical guidance and social responsibility [18], [19]. This pedagogical orientation positions teachers not as centers of epistemic authority but as facilitators of holistic human development grounded in ethical and cultural values [8], [9].

A similar pedagogical shift is evident within Singapore's learner-centered reforms, particularly through the TLLM initiative, which encourages teachers to function as facilitators of enquiry, creativity, and reflective learning rather than as sole transmitters of information [21], [22]. In both paradigms, teachers increasingly function as designers of meaningful learning environments that cultivate learner agency, critical thinking, and self-directed learning [1], [8], [24]. This convergence reflects broader global transformations in educational philosophy associated with the expansion of digital knowledge environments and the growing importance of learner autonomy within twenty-first-century education [1]. As information becomes increasingly accessible through digital technologies and artificial intelligence, pedagogical authority is reconfigured across both frameworks: teachers are expected less to transmit predetermined content and more to accompany learners in interpretation, ethical reflection, and the meaningful use of knowledge [6], [11].

However, important differences remain in the philosophical orientation underlying these pedagogical reforms. Dewantara's facilitative pedagogy emerged within an anti-colonial framework emphasizing cultural emancipation, moral freedom, and humanization [19], [20]. In contrast, Singapore's learner-centered reforms operate within a highly structured policy environment oriented towards national competitiveness, economic adaptability, and state-coordinated educational development. Consequently, while both paradigms support learner-centered education, their institutional motivations and historical trajectories differ significantly [1], [22].

4.3.2. Character education as the foundation of 21st century competencies

The second major convergence lies in the positioning of character education as the ethical foundation of 21CC. Dewantara regarded *Budi Pekerti* as the central purpose of education because character formation integrates intellectual, emotional, moral, and social dimensions of human development [18], [35], [36]. Education that prioritizes cognitive achievement without ethical formation risks producing technically skilled individuals who lack social responsibility, empathy, and moral awareness [8], [10].

Similarly, Singapore's 21CC framework positions values such as integrity, resilience, responsibility, care, and harmony as foundational elements of competency development [21], [23]. Competencies are therefore understood not merely as economic or technical capacities, but as socially and ethically grounded capabilities necessary for responsible citizenship within multicultural and digitally interconnected societies [4], [23], [24]. This convergence reflects the increasing global recognition that future-ready education requires an ethical orientation alongside technological and cognitive competence [1], [8], [36]. In both paradigms, character functions as a moral anchor that enables learners to responsibly navigate uncertainty, complexity, and rapid technological change.

Nevertheless, tension remains in the implementation of competency-based education. Contemporary educational reforms frequently operate within systems shaped by performance indicators, international benchmarking, and economic competitiveness. Under such conditions, character education risks becoming instrumentalized as a mechanism for productivity and social regulation rather than holistic human development [8], [9]. Dewantara's philosophy provides an important critical perspective by emphasizing that education should remain oriented towards human dignity, ethical consciousness, and inner freedom rather than merely workforce preparation [10], [18].

In the context of rapid digitalization and artificial intelligence, this ethical dimension becomes increasingly significant. Both Dewantara's philosophy and Singapore's educational reforms implicitly recognize that technological advancement without moral responsibility may contribute to social fragmentation, declining empathy, and weakened civic engagement [5]–[7]. Consequently, character education increasingly functions not as a supplementary educational component but as a foundational condition for sustaining humane and socially responsible competency development [8], [36].

4.3.3. Collaborative educational ecosystems: synergy among school, family, and community

The third major convergence concerns the ecological understanding of education as a collaborative process involving multiple social institutions. Dewantara's concept of *Tri Pusat Pendidikan* emphasizes that

human development occurs through the interaction of three interconnected educational environments: family, school, and community [18], [20]. These educational centers function collectively to shape moral values, cultural identity, and social responsibility throughout everyday life, reflecting an ecological and socially embedded understanding of education [13], [19].

Singapore operationalizes a similar orientation through initiatives promoting parental engagement, community participation, and shared educational responsibility, particularly through the COMPASS framework [21], [23]. Experiential learning programs, service learning, and community engagement activities further reinforce the relationship between formal education and social experience [24], [30], [37]. In both paradigms, education is increasingly understood not as an isolated institutional process but as a collaborative social ecosystem involving shared responsibility across schools, families, and communities [8], [13].

This convergence reflects broader international shifts towards collaborative and networked models of learning in which education extends beyond formal classroom instruction [8], [13], [37]. In increasingly digital and interconnected societies, learning environments are shaped not only by schools but also by families, communities, social networks, and technological ecosystems [5]–[7]. Both Dewantara's educational philosophy and Singapore's reforms recognize that sustainable education depends on synergy among these interconnected social environments.

At the same time, contemporary educational ecosystems face new challenges associated with digitalization, social fragmentation, and weakening communal interaction. While technological connectivity expands access to information and learning opportunities, it may simultaneously reduce social cohesion and meaningful interpersonal engagement [7], [8]. Dewantara's emphasis on culturally grounded communal relationships therefore offers an important critical perspective for maintaining ethical and social dimensions of education within technologically mediated societies [6], [19]. The convergence identified across these ecological dimensions suggests that future-oriented education increasingly requires integrated collaboration among educational institutions, families, communities, and broader social networks. This orientation positions education not merely as institutional instruction but also as a shared social and cultural responsibility essential for sustaining holistic human development in rapidly changing societies [8], [15], [37].

4.4. Critical reflection on educational convergence

Although the findings demonstrate substantial convergence between Dewantara's humanistic educational philosophy and Singapore's competency-based educational framework, this convergence should not be interpreted as complete philosophical equivalence. Important differences remain in terms of historical orientation, institutional context, and policy implementation. Dewantara's educational philosophy emerged within the context of anti-colonial struggle and cultural emancipation, positioning education as a process of humanization grounded in inner freedom, cultural dignity, and moral autonomy [19], [20]. In contrast, Singapore's education system was developed within a developmental-state framework that emphasized economic competitiveness, national survival, and social cohesion alongside value education [16], [17], [22]. Although both paradigms increasingly priorities learner-centered and value-based education, their historical motivations and institutional trajectories remain distinct.

This distinction also reflects broader tensions within contemporary educational reforms. Competency-based education seeks to prepare learners for rapid technological change, global competition, and digital transformation. However, excessive emphasis on measurable competencies risks instrumentalizing education and reducing human development to economic productivity [8], [9]. Dewantara's philosophy offers an important critical reminder that education must remain oriented towards human flourishing, ethical responsibility, and cultural rootedness rather than solely workforce preparation [10], [18].

At the same time, the convergence identified in this study suggests that local humanistic philosophy and global competency frameworks are not inherently contradictory. Instead, they may function as complementary approaches when educational reform integrates ethical formation, learner autonomy, and social responsibility, with broader competency development. This convergence supports emerging educational discourse advocating culturally responsive and human-centered approaches to twenty-first-century learning [8], [14], [15].

The convergence identified here should be distinguished from the related but distinct concepts of policy borrowing, policy transfer, and policy learning that dominate comparative education scholarship [17], [38]. Policy borrowing and transfer describe processes in which a concrete policy, model, or practice is intentionally moved from one system and adopted, adapted, or imposed on another, whereas policy learning refers to how actors draw lessons from external reference societies. Convergence, as used in this study, makes no claim of transmission or influence between the systems.

Dewantara's philosophy and Singapore's competency framework developed independently, within different historical and political trajectories, and there is no evidence that either borrowed from the other.

What the analysis identifies is therefore not a case of borrowing but of conceptual and functional convergence: two independently developed paradigms arriving at compatible educational principles. Framing the contribution in this way clarifies its theoretical status and guards against the common conflation of similarity with influence in comparative research [38].

As the framework is criteria-based rather than case-bound, it is transferable to other comparisons between culturally grounded educational philosophies and global competency frameworks. It could, for example, be used to examine the convergence between Dewantara's philosophy and Finnish phenomenon-based education, Islamic educational philosophy and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) competency frameworks, Ubuntu philosophy and the Australian curriculum, or Confucian educational thought and the OECD learning compass. In each case, the three criteria—conceptual correspondence, functional equivalence, and complementary orientation—would provide a consistent basis for identifying complementarity while respecting contextual differences [26], [39], [40].

The claims advanced here remain confined to conceptual and policy convergence. They do not establish how either framework is enacted in classrooms or institutional settings. Empirical research should therefore examine how the identified points of convergence are translated into teaching practice, teacher development, and learners' educational experiences across cultural contexts.

These boundaries warrant several caveats. First, as a document-based study, the analysis depends on the researchers' interpretation of texts rather than on observed practice. Second, the convergence criteria necessarily involve researcher judgement, so the mapping of themes to criteria is interpretive rather than mechanical. Third, official policy documents express intentions that may diverge from their implementation in schools and classrooms. Fourth, the identified convergence describes conceptual and policy-level compatibility and does not by itself predict how these principles are enacted in classroom practice. Acknowledging these limits clarifies the scope of the claims and reinforces the need for the empirical research.

4.5. Synthesis of findings

The findings indicate that the convergence between Dewantara's educational philosophy and Singapore's competency-based education framework reflects broader transformations in contemporary education towards humanistic, learner-centered, and socially sustainable learning systems [1], [8]. Although the two paradigms have emerged from different historical and institutional contexts, both increasingly position holistic human development as the central objective of educational reform. A comparative analysis revealed convergence across the three interconnected dimensions. First, both paradigms demonstrate a shift from instructional authority to facilitative pedagogy that emphasizes learner autonomy, reflective learning, and meaningful participation [1], [22], [24]. Second, character education functions as the ethical foundation of competency development, indicating that future-ready education requires moral orientation, empathy, and social responsibility in addition to cognitive and technological capacities [8], [23], [36]. Third, both frameworks conceptualize education as a collaborative and ecological process extending beyond formal schooling through interconnected relationships among schools, families, and communities [14], [15], [37].

At a broader level, the findings suggest that humanistic educational philosophies and competency-based educational reforms are not inherently contradictory. Rather, the convergence identified in this study indicates that competency development becomes more sustainable and socially meaningful when integrated with ethical formation, learner well-being, cultural rootedness, and collaborative educational environments [8], [14], [15]. Dewantara's philosophy therefore provides an important humanistic and culturally grounded perspective that complements contemporary educational reforms increasingly shaped by globalization, digital transformation, and technological change.

Nevertheless, important differences remain in historical orientation and policy implementation. Dewantara's educational philosophy emerged primarily from anti-colonial and cultural-humanistic concerns, whereas Singapore's reforms developed within a state-driven framework closely connected to economic development and global competitiveness [16], [17], [22]. These distinctions indicate that educational convergence does not imply complete philosophical equivalence, but rather reflects selective adaptation and reinterpretation of educational values within different socio-political contexts. Overall, the convergence examined in this study supports the development of educational models that integrate global competencies with humanistic and culturally responsive values. Such integration may contribute to more adaptive, ethical, and socially sustainable education systems capable of responding to the challenges of globalization, digital transformation, and contemporary social change [8], [12], [15]. Table 3 summarizes the degree of convergence across the four analytical dimensions, indicating high convergence in teacher roles, character formation, and educational ecosystems, alongside moderate convergence in overall policy orientation

Table 3. Summary of convergence across analytical dimensions

Dimension	Dewantara	Singapore	Degree of convergence
Teacher role	*Pamong* (mentor and guide)	Facilitator of learning	High
Character formation	*Budi Pekerti*	CCE	High
Educational ecosystem	*Tri Pusat Pendidikan*	COMPASS and community partnerships	High
Policy orientation	Cultural emancipation	Economic competitiveness	Moderate

4.6. Implications for educational practice and policy

Beyond its conceptual contribution, the convergence identified in this study has concrete implications for educational practices. For curriculum development, the findings suggest embedding character and value outcomes directly within competency standards, for example, pairing each 21CC with an explicit ethical disposition (such as collaboration with care or digital literacy with responsible citizenship), rather than treating values as a separate or supplementary subject. For teacher professional development, the shift from instructional authority to facilitative pedagogy implies that pre-service and in-service training should cultivate the *Pamong*-style capacities of modelling, mentoring, and guiding reflection, supported by structured opportunities for teachers to practice facilitative and dialogical methods. For classroom assessment, convergence implies broadening assessment beyond measurable academic performance to include formative and portfolio-based approaches that document ethical reasoning, collaboration, and self-directed learning [8], [23], [36].

At the policy level, the analysis encourages education authorities to institutionalize school–family–community partnerships within competency-based reforms—analogous to *Tri Pusat Pendidikan* and the COMPASS framework—so that ethical formation is reinforced across the wider educational ecosystem rather than confined to the school. For systems such as Indonesia's, the study suggests that locally grounded humanistic philosophy can serve as a resource for, rather than an obstacle to, competency-based reform, enabling policymakers to modernize curricula while preserving cultural identity and ethical purposes [8], [13], [15]. In concrete terms, teacher-education programs could operationalize the *Pamong* role through lesson study, reflective practice, structured mentoring, and enquiry-based instructional design, while continuing professional development could build teachers' capacity for dialogic facilitation and culturally responsive assessment. Embedding such activities within existing competency-based teacher standards would allow ethical and facilitative capacities to be developed and assessed alongside subject and pedagogical knowledge [39], [40].

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that significant convergence exists between Ki Hadjar Dewantara's humanistic educational philosophy and Singapore's competency-based educational framework despite their differing historical and institutional origins. Across pedagogical, ethical, and ecological dimensions, both paradigms increasingly emphasize holistic human development, learner-centered education, character formation, and collaborative educational ecosystems as essential foundations of contemporary education. These findings suggest that humanistic educational philosophy and competency-based educational reforms should not be understood as inherently contradictory paradigms. Rather, the study indicates that competency development becomes more socially meaningful and sustainable when integrated with ethical formation, learner well-being, cultural rootedness, and social responsibility. In this respect, Dewantara's educational philosophy offers an important humanistic and culturally grounded perspective for enriching contemporary educational reform within contexts increasingly shaped by globalization, digital transformation, and artificial intelligence.

Simultaneously, the analysis revealed important contextual differences. Dewantara's philosophy emerged primarily from anti-colonial and cultural-humanistic concerns, whereas Singapore's educational reforms developed within a state-oriented framework closely connected to economic competitiveness and national development. These distinctions demonstrate that educational convergence does not imply complete philosophical equivalence, but rather selective adaptation and reinterpretation of educational values within different socio-political contexts.

This study contributes to comparative education discourse by positioning Dewantara's educational philosophy within broader international discussions on competency-based education, humanistic pedagogy, and culturally responsive learning. Broadly speaking, these findings support the development of educational models that integrate global competencies with ethical, cultural, and socially sustainable educational values. Future research may further examine how these humanistic principles are operationalized within classroom practice, teacher development, and student learning experiences across diverse educational settings. In an era when education systems increasingly seek to balance global competitiveness with cultural identity, the proposed convergence framework offers a theoretically grounded and transferable approach to integrating ethical formation, learner autonomy, and competency development within diverse educational contexts.

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C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
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R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable. This study was based exclusively on document analysis and did not involve human participants or identifiable personal data.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study employed qualitative comparative document analysis using published philosophical texts, official education policy documents, and scholarly literature. It did not involve human participants, animals, or experimental procedures requiring ethical approval.

DATA AVAILABILITY

No new data were created or analyzed in this study. All data were derived from publicly available sources cited in this article.

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