

## Humanistic Activity Design Needs Based on Ki Hajar Dewantara's Philosophy for Elementary Students' Critical and Creative Thinking

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### Abstract

Critical and creative thinking skills are essential competencies for elementary school students. However, classroom practices remain predominantly teacher-centered, limiting students' opportunities for exploration and reflection. This study aims to analyze the need for designing humanistic learning activities based on Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy as a foundation for developing learning models that foster higher-order thinking skills. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, involving fifth-grade students at SD Unggulan Nahdlatul Ulama in Pasuruan City. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings indicate that students tend to be passive, rarely ask questions, and rely heavily on teacher instructions, resulting in underdeveloped critical and creative thinking skills. Moreover, existing learning activities have not adequately reflected humanistic values or the principles of Ing Ngarso Sung Tulada, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, and Tut Wuri Handayani. These results highlight the urgent need for learning activity designs that are more dialogical, reflective, and emancipatory. The study concludes that a humanistic learning design grounded in Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy is necessary to improve learning quality and serves as a conceptual and empirical basis for further research using a design research approach.

Keywords: Creative thinking, Critical thinking, Elementary school, Humanistic activities, Ki\_Hajar\_Dewantara.

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## INTRODUCTION

Basic education plays a strategic role as the foundation for developing intellectual ability and character in students, particularly in cultivating high-level thinking skills (Salihin & Andriany, 2024). Education in Indonesia reveals that the critical and creative thinking skills of elementary school students have not been optimized, as indicated by low analytical skills, the inability to ask questions, and students' dependency on teachers' instructions (Efendi et al., 2023). The learning model remains dominated by a teacher-based approach, hence limiting the space for idea exploration, dialogues, and creative problem-solving (Fitri et al., 2025). Simultaneously, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes on the importance of student-based learning, letting them learn independently and reflectively (De et al., 2024).

This situation demands the birth of a learning design that supports a more humanist, dialogic, and contextual learning experience (Norjanah & Agustina, 2025).

The humanist activity approach is a pivotal foundation to create a learning environment that respects individual potentials, provide a safe psychological space, and supports students' activeness and responsibility in the learning process (Dewi et al., 2024). Humanist values put students as learning subjects with freedom to express opinions, get experiences, and reflect learning purpose individually (Maulidy & Kholis, 2025). Humanist learning also stresses the importance of positive relationships between teachers and students to create a supportive and dialogic learning atmosphere (Faisal & Adi, 2023). One believes that such a condition can stimulate critical and creative thinking skills since students have the space to independently imagine, ask, and evaluate ideas. Therefore, the humanist approach is a relevant framework to answer learning challenges of the 21st century.

In the Indonesian education context, Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy offers a locally humanist perspective which aligns with current learning needs (Fitri et al., 2025). Values such as Ing Ngarso Sung Tulada, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, and Tut Wuri Handayani assert teachers' roles as a guide who provides an example, builds enthusiasm, and gives responsible freedom to students (Efendi et al., 2023). Using the among system, Ki Hajar Dewantara emphasizes on the crucial role of affection, freedom, and reward toward a child's nature as a basic principle of education (Dewi et al., 2024). This philosophy is a strong base to create a learning experience that frees and grows high-level thinking skills (Istiq'faroh, 2020). Integrating universal humanist and Ki Hajar Dewantara's values will enrich a learning design relevant to the characteristics of elementary school students (Faisal & Adi, 2023).

A precedent study showed that a humanist approach and Ki Hajar Dewantara's values have a significant contribution in improving learning quality. Suwar et al. (2025) discovered that Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts are relevant to hacking the critical thinking crisis in education, thus supporting reflective and free learning. Thariq & A'yun (2024) showed that implementing Ki Hajar Dewantara's education philosophy in a deep learning based curriculum will reinforce a participative, student-based learning process. Meanwhile, Thariq & Karima (2023) asserted that Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts have strong relevance with a learning context in the 21st century by developing humanist values that thoroughly supports the potential development of students. These findings show an integration opportunity between a humanist approach and Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts to improve learning quality in elementary schools.

Based on these studies, there is a research gap concerning the need for developing a learning design that specifically integrates humanist principles and Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy to develop critical and creative thinking skills of elementary school students. There are limited studies comprehensively capturing learning conditions as a base to assign a contextual design which follows students' needs. Hence, this study aimed to analyze the need for a humanist activity design based on Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy on elementary school students as an initial step in developing a humanist and free learning activity model. The study provides benefits in portraying real needs in classes, learning design developmental base, and conceptual contribution for learning innovations which supports the reinforcement of students' critical and creative thinking skills.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to portray the actual conditions of learning processes, the implementation of humanistic values, and the development of critical and creative thinking skills of elementary school students based on the philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara. This approach was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of classroom learning phenomena without applying experimental interventions, particularly as an initial stage for learning design development.

The study was conducted over a two-month period during the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. Participants consisted of 26 fifth-grade students and one classroom teacher at SD Unggulan Nahdlatul Ulama, Pasuruan City. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer, responsible for data collection, analysis, and interpretation, while maintaining minimal interference in the natural learning process.

Data were collected using three instruments: (1) observation guidelines to document classroom interactions, student engagement, and teacher practices; (2) semi-structured interview protocols for teachers and selected students to explore learning experiences, perceptions, and constraints; and (3) document analysis sheets to review lesson plans, student worksheets, and field notes. These instruments were designed to capture indicators relevant to humanistic learning principles and students' critical and creative thinking behaviors.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and categorizing information aligned with the research focus, while data display was presented narratively to reveal patterns and relationships. Conclusions were derived through continuous interpretation, linking empirical findings to the objective of identifying learning design needs.

Research ethics were upheld by obtaining permission from the school, informing participants of the research purpose, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents. Triangulation of data sources and methods was applied to enhance credibility and trustworthiness.

The results of this analysis serve as an empirical foundation for the subsequent development of a humanistic learning activity design grounded in Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy, particularly to support the enhancement of elementary students' critical and creative thinking skills.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This section presents the empirical findings obtained from classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. The results are organized thematically to describe the actual learning conditions, students' critical and creative thinking indicators, and supporting evidence from participant perspectives and instructional documents. All findings are reported descriptively without interpretation or evaluative judgment, while further analysis and interpretation are presented in the Discussion section.

### *Classroom Learning Patterns*

Observations conducted on two occasions indicate that learning activities in Grade V were predominantly teacher-led. Lessons typically began with extended explanations delivered by the teacher, followed by note-taking activities. Student involvement through open-ended questions or short discussions was limited. During practice tasks, most students focused on producing brief, correct answers and rarely posed questions or offered alternative responses. These patterns describe the prevailing instructional flow observed in the classroom.

#### *Indicators of Critical and Creative Thinking*

Observed indicators of critical thinking included students' ability to ask questions, provide reasons, compare information, and elaborate answers. Indicators of creative thinking involved generating alternative ideas, modifying examples, and proposing original solutions. The observations showed that when questions required reasoning or comparison, only a small number of students attempted to respond. Written responses were generally short and descriptive. In activities intended to stimulate creativity such as developing story ideas or suggesting alternative solutions most students reproduced examples previously given by the teacher. Out of 26 students, four produced responses that differed from the provided examples.

#### *Interview Findings*

In-depth interviews were conducted with one classroom teacher and six Grade V students to complement observational data. The teacher reported that students generally waited for explicit instructions and were not accustomed to expanding their answers independently. The teacher also stated that lecture-based strategies were frequently used to ensure lesson completion within limited time. Student interviews revealed similar patterns. Four students reported reluctance to ask questions due to fear of giving incorrect answers. One student stated, "I often want to ask, but I am afraid of being scolded or laughed at," while another noted, "I prefer following the example because it may not match what the teacher expects." These responses describe students' classroom experiences as reported by participants.

#### *Document Analysis*

Analysis of lesson plans (RPP), student worksheets, and field notes aligned with the observation and interview data. The reviewed lesson plans emphasized knowledge acquisition and procedural outcomes, with limited opportunities for open discussion or reflection. Student worksheets showed uniform answer patterns, particularly on tasks that allowed multiple possible responses. Field notes recorded prolonged silence when students were invited to express opinions, with few students responding verbally.

### **Discussion**

The findings indicate that learning activities in Grade V remain predominantly instructional and teacher-centered, thereby limiting students' opportunities to develop critical and creative thinking skills. Minimal dialogic interaction restricts students' engagement in questioning, reasoning, and independent evaluation of ideas. This condition aligns with Suwar et al. (2025) who found that limited classroom interaction constrains the development of critical reasoning, while

meaningful interaction is essential to foster inquiry and argumentation skills. Similarly, Tumanggor et al. (2024) emphasized that critical learning requires environments that encourage questioning and dialogue. One-way instructional practices also reinforce students' tendency to focus on single correct answers rather than analytical thinking, supporting the findings of Salihin & Andriany (2024) that transmissive learning models hinder reflective abilities in 21st-century education.

The identified need for students' critical thinking development highlights the importance of learning activities that provide space for questioning, discussion, comparison of ideas, and logical reasoning. This finding is consistent with Wiryanto & Anggraini (2022) who argue that humanistic learning must facilitate intellectual interaction to cultivate the courage to think. The observed low frequency of questioning and reasoning among students further supports Widyalistyorini et al. (2023) who reported that rigid instructional structures limit the growth of evaluative skills in elementary education. Therefore, a dialogic learning design is necessary to support students in developing reasoning-based conclusions and intellectual confidence.

The need to enhance creative thinking skills is evident from students' tendency to produce uniform answers, rely heavily on teacher examples, and avoid the risk of generating new ideas. These findings are consistent with Thariq & Karima (2023) who stated that creativity rarely develops in learning environments lacking opportunities for exploration and freedom of expression. From the perspective of Guilford's theory, creativity requires fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration; however, rigid learning practices inhibit the development of these dimensions. This condition corresponds with Thariq & A'yun (2024) who found that learning models centered on non-innovative curricula can suppress students' creative potential. Consequently, learning designs that incorporate open projects, exploratory tasks, and creative challenges are essential to foster creative thinking skills.

Regarding the humanistic learning approach, the findings demonstrate that humanist values have not been adequately embedded in classroom practices. Humanistic learning emphasizes the creation of a psychologically safe environment and recognition of students' personal experiences, as highlighted by Umam & Syamsiyah (2019). However, this study reveals persistent fear of making mistakes and strong dependency on teacher authority. This condition aligns with Yusuf (2024) who emphasized that freedom in learning must reduce psychological pressure that inhibits students' courage to think. Accordingly, the implementation of a humanistic learning design emerges as a critical need to support the development of both critical and creative thinking skills.

From the perspective of Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy, the findings indicate that the principles of *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa* and *Tut Wuri Handayani* have not been fully realized in classroom practice. Teachers have not consistently adopted the role of facilitators who inspire initiative and support students' independent thinking, as emphasized by Norjanah & Agustina (2025). Moreover, the *among* system, which is grounded in affection, freedom, and guidance, has not been reflected in classroom dynamics, despite its relevance in fostering higher-order thinking skills, as noted by Fitri et al. (2025) in the context of Industry 5.0. These findings reinforce the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy as a foundation for designing learning experiences that promote intellectual freedom

and student autonomy, in line with Istiq'faroh (2020) who stressed the urgency of integrating these values into contemporary educational policies and practices.

Overall, this study contributes theoretically by reinforcing the relevance of humanistic learning principles and Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy as an integrated framework for developing critical and creative thinking skills in elementary education. Practically, the findings provide guidance for teachers and schools to redesign learning activities that emphasize dialogue, reflection, and student autonomy, in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and contemporary learning practices. By identifying concrete classroom needs, this study offers a foundation for future research aimed at developing and implementing humanistic learning designs that are contextually relevant and pedagogically meaningful.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that learning activities in Grade V remain predominantly teacher-centered, limiting opportunities for dialogue, exploration, and reflection, which in turn constrains students' critical and creative thinking skills as reflected in their limited questioning, reasoning, and originality. The findings demonstrate a clear need for a humanistic and dialogic learning environment that fosters intellectual courage among students and a systematic learning design to support higher-order thinking development. Theoretically, this study reinforces the relevance of humanistic learning principles integrated with Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy as a conceptual framework for freedom-oriented learning in elementary education, while practically it provides guidance for teachers and schools to redesign learning activities through open dialogue, problem-solving, reflective practices, and creative tasks within a psychologically safe classroom climate. It is therefore recommended that teachers implement dialogic and student-centered strategies, schools provide targeted professional development to support humanistic practices, and students receive consistent emotional support to build confidence in learning. Future research should focus on developing and empirically testing a humanistic learning activity design based on Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy using a design research approach to evaluate its effectiveness in improving elementary students' critical and creative thinking skills.

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