



Exploring the Thoughts of H.O.S Tjokroaminoto on National Character Education as A Pillar of Indonesian Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Character-related issues in Indonesia have become a critical concern affecting the sustainability of social and national life. Therefore, this study aims to explore the educational thought of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto on character education as a foundation for national transformation. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a literature study method to analyze the key educational concepts proposed by Tjokroaminoto. The findings indicate that Tjokroaminoto emphasized education grounded in moral, spiritual, and nationalistic values as a means of shaping individuals with integrity, religiosity, and a strong sense of national identity. His educational thought remains highly relevant in addressing contemporary educational challenges, including moral crisis, value disorientation, and the potential for social disintegration. Through the internalization of values such as honesty, responsibility, solidarity, and exemplary conduct, character education is viewed as a fundamental strategy for cultivating a young generation that is adaptive, dignified, and capable of competing at the global level without losing its national identity.

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Introduction

Character education has become a strategic issue in the development of the Indonesian nation. Amidst the increasingly massive wave of globalization, Indonesia faces challenges in the form of value disorientation, cultural shifts, and increasing multidimensional crises, such as social inequality, moral degradation, and intergroup conflicts (Afifah, 2017; Sanur & Saripuddin, 2022). Globalization, with all its positive impacts, also brings negative influences that can erode the nation's noble values (Primayana, 2019). In this situation, character education becomes an important effort to strengthen the nation's identity and resilience, ensuring that moral, spiritual, and national values remain a solid foundation in facing the changing times.

H.O.S Tjokroaminoto, a figure known as the “teacher of the nation,” has made a significant contribution to developing a framework for character education. As a thinker and educator, Tjokroaminoto believed that education was not only aimed at transferring knowledge but also at shaping human character with integrity, religiosity, and a nationalist spirit (Haryanto & Kurnia, 2023). The concept of education that he promoted was not only based on religious values, but also emphasized harmony between intellectuality and morality (Rasyid et al., 2024). Through the idea of Islam Kaffah, Tjokroaminoto taught the importance of integrating religious teachings with character development, thereby producing individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also spiritually and ethically strong (Daud, 2013).

In the context of modern education in Indonesia, Tjokroaminoto's ideas are still very relevant. The current education system is often trapped in a pragmatic orientation, focusing more on academic results than character building (Megawanti, 2012). As a result, the moral and social crisis affecting the younger generation is increasing, such as rising deviant behavior, weak national pride, and a loss of respect for diversity (Sanur & Dermawan, 2023; Sanur, 2023b; Sanur et al., 2025b). This is where the importance of revisiting Tjokroaminoto's ideas as a foundation for reforming the national education system, with character education as the top priority, lies.

Much research on character education in Indonesia has been conducted using various approaches. Several studies highlight the importance of character education based on religious values and nationalism in facing the challenges of globalization (Mustofa, 2018; Yuliana, 2010). In addition, other studies show the relevance of role model-based education as an effective approach in shaping the morality and social solidarity of the younger generation (Helmi, 2020; Rizkianto, 2020). Studies on national figures are also frequently conducted, including research on the thoughts of H.O.S Tjokroaminoto, who emphasized the integration of moral, spiritual, and intellectual values in education (Daud, 2013; Mulawarman, 2019). Based on these various studies, character education has proven to be a strategic foundation in developing an adaptive and integrity-driven younger generation. However, there is a gap in research on the more detailed application of Tjokroaminoto's concept of character education in the modern education system, especially in the context of facing the challenges of technological disruption and the morality of the younger generation.

Thus, based on this, this paper aims to reveal the essence of Tjokroaminoto's thoughts on character education and provide a new perspective on how this concept can be adapted and applied in the context of today's education. Moreover, this paper also aims to reaffirm the importance of the role of education in building a strong nation with integrity and a solid identity.

Through this exploration, it is hoped that character education can once again become a main pillar in the national education system, as Tjokroaminoto had once envisioned. This idea is not only important for shaping a young generation with character, but also for creating a more dignified and competitive nation on the global stage. Thus, the thoughts of H.O.S Tjokroaminoto are not only a historical legacy, but also an inspiration for the future of education in Indonesia.

Method

This study applies a descriptive qualitative approach, which relies on data in the form of words and texts to understand certain phenomena. This approach was chosen because of its ability to provide an in-depth and detailed description of a phenomenon, whether natural or man-made (Mamik, 2015). The aim is to describe the phenomenon in detail to understand its patterns, relationships, and meanings in a specific context.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic-historical approach, which involved identifying and grouping H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto's main ideas related to character education into the themes of morality, spirituality, nationality, and social equality. Furthermore, these themes were analyzed conceptually to see their relevance and implications for the modern education system in Indonesia. This approach allowed the author not only to describe Tjokroaminoto's thoughts but also to critically synthesize his contributions in the current context.

The method used is library research, in which all data analyzed comes from literature studies (Zed, 2004). This method aims to explore information from written sources, including academic works, document archives, and reliable online sources. This method allows researchers to build a strong theoretical foundation, understand various perspectives, and construct evidence-based arguments (White, 2011). This study does not involve direct observation or interviews, but focuses on literature analysis to answer research questions and support the main argument. Thus, this study is a deep conceptual and theoretical exploration of the issues discussed.

Result and Discussion

The Thoughts of H.O.S Tjokroaminoto and Principles Relevant to Modern Education and Character Education

H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto viewed education as a process of shaping the whole person, not merely a means of transferring knowledge. According to him, education must integrate moral, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions in order to shape individuals with noble character, responsibility, and social and national awareness (Wijiyanto & Sudrajat, 2019). Therefore, values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and love for the country are placed as the main foundations in educational practice (Wilandra & Emalia, 2022). This view is in line with the contemporary concept of character education, which emphasizes the formation of ethical behavior and moral commitment in everyday life (Salim et al., 2022). Character education not only aims to develop the personal qualities of students, but also to build harmonious social relations through the values of religiosity, nationalism, integrity, mutual cooperation, and independence (Irawan & Rachmat, 2022). In this context, Tjokroaminoto's thinking can be understood as an initial framework for character education that is holistic and oriented towards the social domain.

Amidst the challenges of globalization marked by cultural degradation, value disorientation, and increasing social conflict, character education serves as a mechanism for

strengthening national identity (Yuliana, 2010; Sanur et al., 2025a). Character education not only plays a preventive role against moral crises, but is also transformative in building social and national resilience. This is in line with Tjokroaminoto's view that places education as a strategic instrument in shaping an integrity-based and resilient society (Assidiqi, 2024).

For Tjokroaminoto, character education has a strong collective dimension. The formation of individual character is seen as inseparable from the overall goals of national development (Fatimatuzzahro et al., 2023). A society with strong character is a prerequisite for achieving true independence, whether in political, economic, or cultural aspects (Zain, 2013). Thus, character education is a long-term investment that determines the direction of national transformation that can provide hope for the progress of the nation.

The close relationship between character education and national development is reflected in its ability to shape a generation that is resilient to the negative influences of globalization, such as extreme individualism, corruption, and social disintegration (Rasyid et al., 2024). Universal values such as honesty, tolerance, cooperation, and love for the homeland not only shape moral individuals (Muamar, 2019), but also strengthen social solidarity in a pluralistic society (Sahroni, 2017).

In the context of modern education and technological disruption, Tjokroaminoto's thinking remains relevant as a normative and strategic reference. The values of social justice, nationalism, and moral courage that he espoused can be adapted to shape an adaptive generation without losing its national identity (Anggoro, 2022). Character education, in this framework, not only serves to shape academically competent individuals (Ridwan, 2020a), but also prepares future leaders who are integrity and visionary (Wijiyanto & Sudrajat, 2019).

a) Character Education in the Thoughts of H.O.S Tjokroaminoto

Tjokroaminoto's thoughts on character education are rooted in the integration of moral and spiritual values as the foundation for the formation of dignified human beings (Toni et al., 2018). Education is understood as a means of fostering good character, social responsibility, and national awareness, not merely the mastery of knowledge (Nurdin, 2016). With this approach, education is directed at producing individuals who are able to combine intellectual intelligence with moral and spiritual strength.

Role modeling occupies a central position in Tjokroaminoto's concept of character education. He emphasized that educators must be real examples through consistency between the values taught and daily life practices (Yuliana, 2010), and this is relevant to the findings of Ramdhani and Sanur's (2022) research, which states that character building can be manifested through the exemplary values of figures. Tjokroaminoto's exemplary character was reflected in his leadership in Sarekat Islam, where the values of honesty and justice were applied concretely in socio-political struggles (Rizkianto, 2020). The informal educational environment in his home in Surabaya became a space for character learning for national movement figures such as Soekarno and Semaun (Koto & Priyoyudanto, 2024).

Honesty and responsibility were fundamental values in Tjokroaminoto's thinking. He believed that national progress could not be achieved without the moral integrity of individuals and leaders (Zain, 2013). Through his struggle in Sarekat Islam, the value of responsibility was manifested in a commitment to the collective welfare of society (Mulawarman, 2019). Thus, according to Tjokroaminoto, character education serves as an ethical foundation for the development of a just and dignified nation.

b) The Principle of Moral and Spiritual-Based Education

Tjokroaminoto placed Islamic teachings as the ethical basis of education, using the Qur'an and Hadith as references for the formation of character and social responsibility (Wijiyanto & Sudrajat, 2019). Moral and spiritual-based education is not interpreted solely in a doctrinal sense, but rather directed towards the internalization of values of justice, respect for others, and social awareness (Jamilah et al., 2023).

This approach is seen as a fundamental solution to various social problems and inequalities faced by society. Education that instills moral and spiritual values is positioned as a transformative force in building an independent and dignified nation (Ridwan, 2020b). In the modern context, this principle remains relevant as an ethical foundation in facing complex global dynamics.

In addition to shaping individual character, moral and spiritual-based education also plays a strategic role in building collective awareness in society. Ethical values internalized through the educational process encourage critical thinking, social responsibility, and commitment to structural justice, so that education does not stop at the personal dimension but contributes to sustainable social transformation. Thus, moral and spiritual education as formulated by Tjokroaminoto can be understood as the foundation for shaping citizens with integrity, competitiveness, and the ability to maintain a balance between material progress and human values.

c) Principles Relevant to Modern Education

Tjokroaminoto's educational philosophy contains holistic principles that are relevant to the needs of 21st-century education. Education is directed at developing well-rounded individuals, with a balance between intellectual, moral, and spiritual development (Badarussyamsi et al., 2023). National values and equality are placed as an integral part of the educational process, so that education functions as an instrument for shaping a just and civilized society (Ahdar et al., 2021). This holistic approach emphasizes that modern education should not be solely focused on academic achievement (Farida, 2016), but should also shape the integrity, empathy, and social awareness of students (Haryanto & Kurnia, 2023).

In contemporary educational practice, the holistic principle proposed by Tjokroaminoto is in line with the transformative education paradigm that emphasizes the development of 21st-century competencies, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and social responsibility. The integration of moral, spiritual, and national values in the learning process allows education to function not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also as a space for character building and civic awareness. Thus, modern education based on this thinking has the potential to produce a generation that is adaptive to global changes, without losing its ethical orientation and commitment to social justice and national unity.

d) Application of National Values and Equality

As a national movement figure, Tjokroaminoto emphasized education as a means of internalizing national values and unity in diversity (Suharto & Abdurakhman, 2023). Nationalism is taught from an early age so that students develop a sense of national identity amid the influence of global culture (Assidiqi, 2024). The concept of equality is embodied in the idea of Islamic Socialism, which affirms the right to education for all individuals without social and economic discrimination (Koto & Priyoyudanto, 2024). This principle is relevant to modern education that is oriented towards justice, inclusiveness, and character building

(Mustofa, 2018). By adopting these principles, education in Indonesia can strengthen national identity while increasing global competitiveness without losing its identity.

The application of national values and equality in education, as emphasized by Tjokroaminoto, confirms the strategic role of education as a vehicle for shaping inclusive national consciousness. The internalization of nationalism based on the principles of social justice and respect for diversity encourages the creation of a democratic and unity-oriented educational climate. In the context of globalization, the integration of national values and equality serves as a buffer for national identity, while equipping students with an open, tolerant, and competitive attitude, so that education is able to respond to global challenges without neglecting the fundamental values of the nation.

The Influence of Tjokroaminoto's Thoughts on the National Movement and the Application of Character Values in Schools

The thoughts of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto had a significant influence not only in the field of education, but also in the formation of Indonesian national consciousness. Through his role as a central figure in Sarekat Islam, he utilized formal and informal education as a medium for instilling the values of struggle, political awareness, and nationalism, which then shaped the mindset of the national movement generation (Mulawarman, 2019). The integration of spiritual values and national spirit that he initiated shows that education serves as a strategic instrument in building collective consciousness towards independence (Wijiyanto & Sudrajat, 2020). Thus, education is positioned not only as a means of intellectual improvement, but also as the ideological foundation of the struggle and development of the nation.

a) Inspiration for the National Leadership Generation

Tjokroaminoto is known as the “teacher of the nation” who played an important role in shaping the mindsets of key figures in the national movement such as Soekarno, Musso, Alimin, and Kartosuwiryo (Irawan & Rachmat, 2022). His home in Surabaya served as an informal educational space that encouraged critical discussion on social, political, and national issues, thereby fostering intellectual and ideological awareness among young people (Helmi, 2020). This role confirms the position of educators as strategic actors in the formation of national leadership.

Exemplary behavior was a key aspect of the educational process he applied. Tjokroaminoto not only conveyed ideas (Zain, 2013), but also demonstrated the direct practice of the values of justice, integrity, and commitment to the struggle for independence (Nasrullah, 2018). These values were then internalized by his students and carried into the national struggle as the basis for their political attitudes and orientation (Nurdin, 2016). Soekarno, for example, openly acknowledged that his nationalist thinking was greatly influenced by the way Tjokroaminoto linked spiritual values with a national vision (Siregar et al., 2022). This shows that Tjokroaminoto's influence was not merely personal, but formed the ideological foundation of the Indonesian nationalist movement.

The educational experience that Tjokroaminoto built through exemplary behavior, critical dialogue, and the instilling of ideological values shows that the formation of national leaders cannot be separated from a reflective and contextual educational process. Education does not only transmit political and national knowledge, but also shapes leadership character based on moral integrity, courage of thought, and social sensitivity. In the context of modern education, this model is relevant as a reference for the development of value-oriented national leadership,

so that it can produce a generation of leaders who are visionary, rooted in the nation's identity, and responsive to the ever-evolving socio-political dynamics.

b) The Application of Tjokroaminoto's Values in Schools

Tjokroaminoto's educational philosophy offers a character-building approach through the integration of religious, nationalistic, and humanitarian values (Fatimatuazzahro et al., 2023). This approach stems from the informal educational practices he implemented at his boarding house on Jalan Peneleh, Surabaya, which proved effective in shaping individuals with integrity and a focus on the interests of the nation (Helmi, 2020). This experience shows that education based on universal and contextual values can produce students who are not only intellectually superior but also have moral and social commitment.

In the context of formal education in schools, the values inherited from Tjokroaminoto can be implemented through the strengthening of character education integrated into the curriculum, school culture, and learning practices. The integration of religious, nationalistic, and humanitarian values is not only realized through teaching materials, but also through the exemplary behavior of teachers, the cultivation of attitudes, and spaces for dialogue that encourage students to think critically and be socially responsible. With this approach, schools function as spaces for character building and national awareness, so that education can produce a generation with integrity, empathy, and a commitment to serving the nation and state.

c) Role Model-Based Education

In Tjokroaminoto's view, role modeling is the core of effective education. An educator is required to be a figure who is consistent between words and actions (Jamil, 2021), so that the values of honesty and responsibility can be instilled authentically in students (Wijiyanto & Sudrajat, 2020). This role modeling builds students' trust and respect for educators, which is a prerequisite for the continuous internalization of character values.

Discipline is also seen as an important element in character building. Tjokroaminoto implemented strict but humane rules to train responsibility and respect for time (Mustofa, 2018). This discipline is not only oriented towards academic activities but also towards the formation of a disciplined attitude and readiness to face social challenges (Muamar, 2019). In addition, the value of nationalism is instilled through an understanding of the nation's history of struggle, so that students have historical awareness and a responsibility to contribute to society (Novitasari et al., 2019; Sanur, 2023a).

Exemplary education as practiced by Tjokroaminoto emphasizes that the success of character education is largely determined by the personal integrity of educators in their daily lives. Consistency between the values taught and the behavior displayed makes the educational process more meaningful and has a long-term impact on students. In the context of modern education, role modeling, discipline, and the instillation of nationalism are important foundations in shaping the character of the younger generation to be responsible, historically aware, and have a moral and social commitment to play an active role in the development of society and the nation.

d) Strengthening Religious and Socialist Values

Tjokroaminoto emphasized that religious education should be directed towards the appreciation of substantive values, not merely the mastery of formal doctrine (Mulawarman,

2019). The values of honesty, simplicity, and gratitude are instilled through daily practices so that they are continuously internalized in the character of students (Nasrullah, 2018). The integration of religious values in educational activities aims to shape individuals with noble character who are also sensitive to the social realities around them.

Within the framework of Islamic socialism, Tjokroaminoto instilled the principles of cooperation, justice, and social solidarity as the foundation of community life (Britannica, 2024). Students are involved in various collective activities, such as community service and social projects, to foster awareness of the importance of togetherness, social responsibility, and concern for others (Novitasari et al., 2019). The values of simplicity and respect for diversity are also emphasized as the foundation for an inclusive and just social life (Badarusyamsi et al., 2023).

The implementation of these religious and socialist values in the context of modern education requires systematic and sustainable strategies, such as through the development of character-based curricula and strengthening the role of teachers as inspirational figures (Salim et al., 2022; Ridha et al., 2025), as well as optimizing extracurricular activities that encourage the growth of national awareness and social concern among students (Rizkianto, 2020). With consistent implementation, schools have the potential to become strategic spaces for producing a generation that is intellectually superior and morally upright (Junaidi et al., 2023).

Ultimately, role model-based education combined with the strengthening of religious and socialist values as taught by Tjokroaminoto remains relevant in responding to contemporary educational challenges. This approach contributes to the development of a generation with integrity, social awareness, and love for the homeland, enabling them to play an active role in national development amid increasingly complex global dynamics.

Conclusion

H.O.S Tjokroaminoto's thinking emphasizes the importance of character education as the main foundation in building a moral, independent, and competitive nation. Education is seen not only as a means of developing intellectual intelligence, but also as a process of shaping a personality that is integrity, religious, and nationalistic. His concept includes exemplary behavior, honesty, responsibility, and the integration of moral and spiritual values in educational practices as key elements in realizing the ideal human being.

The relevance of his thoughts to modern education is very high. In the context of globalization and the moral challenges of the younger generation, the values he taught can be the foundation for overcoming problems of value disorientation, cultural degradation, and social conflict. Character education based on Tjokroaminoto's teachings encourages inclusiveness, solidarity, and national spirit, which are important for facing the digital age and building a strong and harmonious nation. By adapting and contextualizing Tjokroaminoto's thoughts, the Indonesian education system can prioritize the formation of a young generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also has high morality and social responsibility. This kind of education is a strategic choice for realizing a dignified, just society that is able to compete globally without losing its national identity.

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