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Cultivating Nationalism through History Education: A Critical Examination of Pedagogical Practice in Post-Colonial Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the cultivation of nationalist values through history education at SMA Negeri 1 Gondang, Indonesia, investigating the disjuncture between policy aspirations and classroom practice in a post-colonial context increasingly shaped by globalisation. Drawing on qualitative case study methodology, the research reveals that while teachers demonstrate commitment to fostering nationalism through the Proclamation of Independence narrative, cultivation remains superficial, characterised by transmission-oriented pedagogy that presents nationalism as an unproblematic value to be absorbed rather than a contested historical construct requiring critical engagement. The absence of explicit learning objectives for nationalism, limited teacher professional development, and the persistence of examination-oriented pedagogies constrain meaningful value cultivation. This study argues that effective nationalist values education in post-colonial contexts requires moving beyond transmission toward critical pedagogy that enables students to interrogate nationalism's historical construction and contemporary relevance.

KEYWORDS

Nationalism; History Education; Post-colonial Pedagogy; Indonesia; Values Education

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini mengkaji penanaman nilai nasionalisme melalui pendidikan sejarah di SMA Negeri 1 Gondang, Indonesia, menyelidiki kesenjangan antara aspirasi kebijakan dan praktik kelas dalam konteks pascakolonial yang dipengaruhi globalisasi. Dengan metodologi studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian mengungkap bahwa meskipun guru berkomitmen menumbuhkan nasionalisme melalui narasi Proklamasi, penanaman tetap dangkal, ditandai pedagogi transmisi yang menyajikan nasionalisme sebagai nilai tak bermasalah untuk diserap, bukan konstruksi historis yang diperdebatkan. Minimnya tujuan eksplisit, terbatasnya pengembangan profesional guru, dan pedagogi berorientasi ujian menghambat penanaman bermakna. Studi berargumen bahwa pendidikan nasionalisme efektif di pascakolonial perlu melampaui transmisi menuju pedagogi kritis yang memungkinkan siswa menginterogasi konstruksi historis dan relevansi kontempornya.

KATA KUNCI

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Introduction

Globalisation has fundamentally transformed the landscape of education worldwide, creating both opportunities and challenges for the cultivation of national identity and civic values. The accelerated flow of information, ideas, and cultural products across borders has exposed young people to diverse influences that can both enrich and complicate their sense of national belonging. (Hung, 2025; Kim & Kwon, 2023). In Indonesia, as in many post-colonial societies, the tension between global integration and national identity preservation has become particularly acute, with educators grappling to maintain the relevance of nationalist values in an increasingly interconnected world (Eddyono, 2020; S. W. Fitriati & Rata, 2021).

Concerns about declining nationalism among Indonesian youth have intensified in recent decades. Research has documented the erosion of nationalist sentiments among younger generations, manifested in diminished respect for national symbols, declining interest in patriotic rituals, and a growing preference for foreign cultural products over local alternatives (Anoraga & Sakai, 2023; Ratri et al., 2025). These trends have been attributed partly to the negative impacts of globalisation, which has introduced foreign cultural influences that can undermine local values and identities (Ratri et al., 2025; Ullah & Ming Yit Ho, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these concerns, as prolonged remote learning disrupted the social and civic dimensions of schooling that traditionally support nationalist values cultivation (Montessori et al., 2024; Wilf et al., 2023).

Within this challenging context, history education has been identified as a strategically important vehicle for revitalising nationalist values. History, with its focus on the nation's journey from colonial subjugation to independence, is uniquely positioned to cultivate pride, patriotism, and a sense of shared destiny (Fadlallah & Janmaat, 2024; Shume Nadew et al., 2024). The Proclamation of Indonesian Independence, a defining moment in the nation's history, is frequently invoked as a source of nationalist values that can inspire contemporary youth to emulate the courage, sacrifice, and unity of their forebears (Y. Wang et al., 2024; Yuliantri & Suwignyo, 2024).

The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022 represented a significant attempt to reform Indonesian education and address these challenges. Emphasising essential materials, student-centred learning, and character development through the Pancasila Student Profile, the curriculum reflects an aspiration to move beyond transmission-oriented pedagogy toward more engaging and relevant learning experiences (Rohmah et al., 2024; Yoto et al., 2024). However, the implementation of curriculum reform in Indonesian schools has consistently faced obstacles, including limited teacher preparation, inadequate resources, and the persistence of examination-oriented approaches that privilege cognitive outcomes over affective and value-based learning (F. Fitriati et al., 2024; Rohmah et al., 2024). Research on the Merdeka Curriculum has identified that history teachers continue to face obstacles in implementing alternative learning strategies designed to develop students' historical thinking skills (Geshere et al., 2025; Rohmah et al., 2024).

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond the Indonesian context. As educational systems worldwide grapple with the challenge of preparing students for citizenship in an era of globalisation, understanding how nationalist values are cultivated in specific institutional and cultural contexts becomes increasingly important (L. Wang & Print, 2024; Wu & Tse, 2025). By examining the cultivation of nationalism in Indonesian history

education, this study contributes to broader international conversations about values education, post-colonial pedagogy, and the role of history in shaping national identity.

Research Questions

1. How do history teachers plan and implement the cultivation of nationalist values through teaching the Proclamation of Independence?
2. What obstacles impede effective nationalist values cultivation?
3. How do students perceive and respond to nationalist values in history instruction?

Literature Review

Nationalism in Post-Colonial Perspective

Understanding nationalism cultivation in Indonesian history education requires situating analysis within post-colonial theoretical frameworks. Nationalism, as Abdullah (2001) observes, represents an aspiration to define boundaries between "us who are compatriots" and those from other nations, between "our country" and their country. This conception, while foundational, obscures the contested and historically constructed nature of national identity. In post-colonial societies like Indonesia, nationalism emerged through anti-colonial struggle, yet the specific content and character of nationalism has been shaped by competing political projects, from the anti-imperialist solidarity of the independence movement to the authoritarian nationalism of the New Order regime (Edyono, 2020; Vickers, 2023).

The New Order regime (1966-1998) played a particularly significant role in shaping Indonesian nationalism through education. The regime's politics of history involved the systematic construction of a national narrative that legitimised state power, marginalised alternative perspectives, and cultivated a militaristic, anti-communist nationalism that served regime interests (Pratama, 2022; Vickers, 2023). Historical textbooks during this era presented a sanitised, unified narrative that emphasised national unity and the heroic role of the military while suppressing discussion of the complexities, contradictions, and violence that accompanied Indonesia's nation-building project (Pratama, 2022).

The post-1998 Reformasi era has brought aspirations toward more critical and pluralistic historical education, yet the legacies of New Order historiography persist in curriculum structures, teacher practices, and public expectations (Pratama, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on the Pancasila Student Profile, with its dimensions of critical reasoning and global diversity, represents an attempt to move beyond this instrumental approach while maintaining the nation-building function of education. However, the tension between cultivating critical historical consciousness and inculcating prescribed nationalist values remains unresolved in curriculum policy and classroom practice (Rachman et al., 2024; Smets, 2024).

Critical scholarship challenges the assumption that nationalism is an unproblematic value to be transmitted through education. Scholars of critical pedagogy argue that education can either reproduce dominant ideologies or enable students to develop critical consciousness and challenge oppressive structures (Freire et al., 2018). In the context of nationalism education, this suggests that teachers face a choice between presenting nationalism as a fixed, unquestionable value or enabling students to interrogate

nationalism's historical construction, its exclusions and inclusions, and its contemporary relevance and limitations.

Historical Consciousness and National Identity

The cultivation of nationalism through history education necessarily engages with questions of historical consciousness. Rüsen's (2005) foundational work conceptualises historical consciousness as the mental operations that define historical thinking's role in human culture, encompassing not merely cognitive operations but also moral and affective dimensions. Rüsen's typology of historical consciousness, encompassing traditional, exemplary, critical, and genetic forms, offers a framework for understanding how students' engagement with the past operates at different levels of sophistication.

Traditional and exemplary forms treat the past as a repository of fixed lessons or moral exemplars, presenting historical figures as models to be emulated and historical events as sources of unchanging values. This approach, while common in values education, tends to foreclose critical engagement with historical complexity. Critical and genetic forms, by contrast, recognise the constructed nature of historical narratives, the multiplicity of perspectives, and the contingency of historical development. The development of critical historical consciousness enables students to recognise that nationalism itself has a history, that its meanings and expressions have changed over time, and that contemporary nationalism involves choices about which values to prioritise and how to interpret the nation's past.

Wineburg's (2001) work on historical thinking complements Rüsen's framework by emphasising the "unnatural" character of genuine historical understanding. Historical thinking requires overcoming presentism, recognising the fundamental otherness of the past, and engaging with the complexity and ambiguity of historical sources. This capacity for self-transcendence is essential for developing a critically reflective nationalism that can acknowledge both the achievements and the limitations of the nation's history. As Wineburg argues, historical thinking teaches us "to go beyond our own image, to go beyond our brief life, and to go beyond the fleeting moment in human history into which we've been born" (Wineburg, 2001). This orientation enables students to recognise that nationalism, like all human constructs, is historically contingent and subject to critical examination.

Curriculum Implementation and Teacher Agency

Understanding nationalist values cultivation also requires engagement with theories of curriculum implementation and teacher agency. Fullan's (2025) theory of educational change emphasises that successful implementation requires attention to multiple dimensions: the possible use of new or revised materials, the possible use of new teaching approaches, and the possible alteration of beliefs. Curriculum reform that focuses narrowly on materials without addressing the deeper shifts in teacher beliefs and pedagogical practice is unlikely to achieve meaningful change.

Fullan's framework identifies several factors that influence implementation success, including the clarity and complexity of the innovation, the quality and practicality of professional development, and the presence of supportive organisational structures. Crucially, Fullan emphasises that implementation is not a linear process but one characterised by uncertainty, struggle, and the need for sustained support. Teachers navigating

curriculum reform must make sense of new expectations, develop new competencies, and reconcile reform demands with their existing professional identities and established practices. This sensemaking process is inherently subjective and shaped by teachers' prior experiences, institutional contexts, and the meanings they attach to educational change (Ndomondo et al., 2022; T. Wang et al., 2021).

Teacher agency has emerged as a critical concept for understanding curriculum implementation. Research on teacher agency in the context of curriculum reform reveals that teachers are not passive recipients of reform but active agents whose interpretations, adaptations, and innovations shape implementation outcomes (Pratama, 2022; Smith et al., 2025). Factors influencing teacher agency include professional knowledge and skills, beliefs and values, school culture and leadership, and the broader policy environment. In the context of values education, teacher agency is particularly significant, as teachers must make judgments about how to interpret and enact value-based curriculum requirements in ways that are authentic to their contexts and responsive to their students' needs.

Method

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate the cultivation of nationalist values in history education at SMA Negeri 1 Gondang. The qualitative approach was selected for its capacity to generate rich, contextualised understanding of educational practices as they unfold in natural settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Unlike quantitative methods that privilege measurement and generalisation, qualitative inquiry enables researchers to explore the meanings that participants attach to their experiences, the tacit knowledge that shapes practice, and the complex interplay of factors that influence educational outcomes.

The case study design was specifically chosen for its appropriateness in examining contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin & Campbell, 2018). As an intrinsic case study, this research focuses on understanding the particular case of SMA Negeri 1 Gondang in its specificity, rather than seeking statistical generalisability (Stake, 1995). The intrinsic case study approach is appropriate when the case itself is of interest due to its unique characteristics, in this instance, the school's location in a region with a significant history of the national independence movement and its status as a typical Indonesian public senior high school navigating the challenges of curriculum reform in the post-colonial era.

The selection of SMA Negeri 1 Gondang as the research site was purposive. The school's commitment to values education, as reflected in its vision statement emphasising discipline and noble character, made it an appropriate site for examining how nationalist values are cultivated through history instruction. The school's implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum provided a relevant policy context for the investigation.

Data and Sources of Data

Data for this study were drawn from multiple sources to enable comprehensive understanding of nationalist values cultivation. Primary data sources included three categories of informants. History teachers constituted the first category. One history teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Gondang was selected for her experience teaching the Proclamation of Independence material to Grade XI social science students. The teacher's perspectives were essential for understanding how nationalist values are conceptualised, planned, and implemented in classroom practice.

Students constituted the second category of informants. Students from Grade XI social science classes were selected to represent diverse perspectives on history instruction and nationalist values. Student selection was guided by teacher recommendations and classroom observation to ensure representation across different levels of engagement and academic achievement. Student interviews explored perceptions of history instruction, engagement with nationalist content, and awareness of nationalist values in their learning experiences.

Classroom activities constituted a second major data source. Direct observation of history lessons across multiple sessions documented teacher-student interactions, instructional strategies, student engagement patterns, and the enactment of nationalist values cultivation in practice. Observations focused on identifying how nationalist values were introduced, the pedagogical strategies employed, and student responses.

Documentary evidence constituted a third data source. Lesson plans (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran*), syllabi, teaching materials, and assessment documents were collected and analysed to understand how nationalist values were articulated in formal curriculum documents. The school's vision statement and disciplinary policies provided insight into institutional commitments to values education.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred over a structured period from January to March 2023, enabling concentrated engagement with participants and observation of multiple instructional sessions. The research team employed three principal data collection techniques.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants to explore their perspectives on nationalist values cultivation in depth. Interview protocols were developed to address the research questions while maintaining flexibility to pursue emergent themes. Teacher interviews explored conceptualisations of nationalist values, specific strategies for cultivating nationalism through history instruction, perceived obstacles, and professional development experiences. Student interviews investigated perceptions of nationalist content in history instruction, engagement with nationalist values, and the relevance of nationalist learning to their lives. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Non-participant observation of history lessons was conducted across multiple class sessions. The researcher observed instructional activities, teacher-student interactions, student engagement behaviours, and the explicit and implicit communication of nationalist values. Observation protocols focused on identifying how nationalist values were introduced, the pedagogical strategies employed, and student responses. Detailed field notes were maintained throughout the observation period.

Document analysis involved systematic collection and review of relevant documents. Lesson plans, syllabi, and assessment materials were analysed to identify how nationalist values were articulated in formal curriculum documents. Document analysis focused on the alignment between stated curriculum objectives and observed practice, as well as the extent to which nationalist values were systematically integrated into instructional materials.

Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure the trustworthiness of findings, this study employed multiple strategies aligned with qualitative research standards. Triangulation was pursued across sources, comparing data from teachers, students, and documents; and across techniques, cross-verifying observation, interview, and documentary evidence. This triangulation enabled identification of convergent patterns while also revealing tensions and contradictions that enriched understanding.

Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants and soliciting feedback on interpretations. This process helped ensure that researcher interpretations accurately reflected participant perspectives and enabled participants to correct misunderstandings or add nuance. The researcher maintained detailed field notes documenting contextual factors and reflexive observations throughout the research process.

Thick description of the setting, participants, and practices enables readers to assess the transferability of findings to other contexts. Detailed contextual information about the school, community, and educational policy environment supports informed judgment about applicability. The researcher documented the school's characteristics, the broader institutional and policy context, and the specific conditions shaping nationalist values cultivation at the site.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative, thematic approach consistent with qualitative research conventions. The analysis process comprised several phases aligned with Miles et al.'s (2020) interactive model. Data reduction involved systematic review and condensation of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence. This process entailed identifying relevant passages, coding for thematic content, and organising data according to emerging categories. Initial codes were derived both from the theoretical framework (deductive coding) and from patterns emerging from the data (inductive coding). Codes were organised around the research questions, addressing conceptualisations of nationalist values, planning practices, implementation practices, and obstacles.

Data display organised condensed data into thematic matrices and narrative summaries to facilitate pattern identification and cross-case comparison. Displays enabled systematic examination of relationships between concepts, identification of convergent and divergent patterns, and testing of emerging interpretations against the full range of evidence. Data were organised around themes including teacher conceptions, planning practices, implementation strategies, obstacles, and student perspectives.

Conclusion drawing and verification were conducted iteratively through constant comparison of data across sources and techniques. Emerging interpretations were tested

against discrepant cases and alternative explanations. The researcher engaged in ongoing reflection on how personal assumptions and perspectives might shape data collection and interpretation. Final conclusions were grounded in the full range of evidence and subjected to member checking to enhance credibility.

Results

Teacher Conceptions of Nationalist Values

The study revealed that the history teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Gondang demonstrated awareness of nationalism as a concept while holding a transmission-oriented understanding of how nationalist values should be cultivated through history education. The teacher articulated nationalism in terms of values including unity, love of country, discipline, courage, and willingness to sacrifice. These values align with Aman's (2011) formulation of nationalism as encompassing pride in being Indonesian, love of country and nation, willingness to sacrifice for the nation, acceptance of diversity, pride in cultural diversity, appreciation for the heroes' contributions, and prioritisation of the common good (Skårås, 2021).

The teacher conceptualised the Proclamation of Independence as the primary vehicle for cultivating these values. The Proclamation narrative was understood as a source of inspirational examples, with historical figures modelling the courage, unity, and sacrifice that contemporary students should emulate. This understanding reflects what Edling et al. (2020) identify as the exemplary function of historical consciousness, where the past serves as a repository of moral lessons applicable to the present.

However, the teacher's conception of nationalism did not extend to critical engagement with nationalism as a historically constructed and politically contested concept. When asked about the goals of nationalist values cultivation, the teacher emphasised behavioural outcomes such as students' discipline, respect for national symbols, and compliance with school rules. The teacher did not articulate goals related to developing critical historical consciousness, interrogating dominant narratives, or understanding how nationalist values have been shaped by political interests and historical contingencies.

This finding is consistent with broader patterns in Indonesian values education, where nationalism is often presented as an unproblematic value to be transmitted rather than a complex concept requiring critical examination (Eddyono, 2020). The teacher's conception reflects the legacy of New Order historiography, which presented a unified, sanitised national narrative that foreclosed critical engagement with historical complexity (Pratama, 2022; Vickers, 2023).

Planning for Nationalist Values Cultivation

The study revealed significant limitations in the planning for nationalist values cultivation. While the teacher had developed lesson plans and syllabi for teaching the Proclamation of Independence, these documents did not include explicit learning objectives for nationalist values cultivation. As the teacher explained, "I do not create new learning objectives, I use the existing objectives from the syllabus and programme of study, and insert nationalist values that will be cultivated during the implementation phase."

This absence of explicit objectives for values cultivation is significant. Without clear learning objectives, values cultivation becomes incidental rather than deliberate,

dependent on the teacher's ad hoc decisions during instruction rather than systematically designed into the learning experience. The teacher's approach reflects what Fullan (2025) identifies as superficial engagement with curriculum reform, where teachers adopt the language of reform without fundamentally rethinking their practice.

The teacher's lesson plans included the Discovery Learning model, with discussion and lecture methods, and video and PowerPoint media. However, these elements were not specifically designed to cultivate nationalist values. The Discovery Learning model, with its emphasis on student-centred inquiry, has potential for enabling students to engage critically with historical narratives and develop their own understandings of nationalism. However, in practice, the model was implemented in ways that did not realise this potential.

The assessment planning also reflected limited attention to nationalist values cultivation. While the teacher assessed students across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, the affective assessment of nationalist values was informal and unsystematic. The teacher explained that assessment of values occurred through observation of students' behaviour in the school environment, rather than through systematic assessment of their understanding or internalisation of nationalist values. This finding is consistent with broader research on assessment challenges in values education, where the affective dimensions of learning are difficult to measure using conventional assessment approaches (Oteng et al., 2023).

Implementation of Nationalist Values Cultivation

The implementation of nationalist values cultivation in history classrooms at SMA Negeri 1 Gondang was characterised by transmission-oriented pedagogy that presented nationalism as an unproblematic value to be absorbed. The teacher employed several strategies to address nationalist dimensions in instruction, beginning with the opening activities (*orientasi*, *apersepsi*, *motivasi*) and extending through the core activities and closing activities.

In the opening activities, the teacher established classroom routines including greetings, prayer, checking attendance, and checking student discipline. These routines, while ostensibly classroom management practices, also served to cultivate values of discipline and respect. The teacher's attention to discipline reflects the emphasis on behavioural compliance that characterises much values education in Indonesian schools (Hastasari et al., 2022).

In the core activities, the teacher employed Discovery Learning with discussion and lecture methods. The lesson began with the teacher showing a video about the Rengasdengklok incident, a key event in the lead-up to the Proclamation. Students were directed to observe the video, then the teacher posed questions and facilitated discussion. However, the discussion was limited in depth and did not extend to critical examination of the historical narrative. The teacher presented the Proclamation narrative as a straightforward heroic story, without acknowledging the political debates, disagreements, and uncertainties that surrounded the events.

The nationalist values that the teacher sought to cultivate through this instruction included love of country, unity, discipline, courage, and willingness to sacrifice. These values were communicated through the teacher's commentary on the historical events, with the

teacher explicitly connecting the actions of historical figures to contemporary values. For example, the teacher highlighted the courage of the young generation in the Rengasdengklok incident as a model for students' own courage in facing challenges.

However, the pedagogical approach did not enable students to engage critically with the nationalist values being presented. Students were expected to accept the values as given rather than to interrogate their meaning, relevance, or limitations. This approach reflects what Freire et al. (2018) critique as "banking education," where teachers deposit knowledge into passive students who are expected to receive and memorise rather than to question and create.

In the closing activities, the teacher reviewed the lesson, asked if students had questions, provided a summary, and assigned homework. These activities reinforced the transmission model, with the teacher positioned as the authoritative source of knowledge and values. The teacher did not invite students to reflect critically on the nationalist values presented or to consider how these values might be relevant to their own lives in ways that go beyond simple emulation of historical figures.

Obstacles to Effective Nationalist Values Cultivation

The study identified several obstacles that impeded effective cultivation of nationalist values in history education. These obstacles reflect both the specific challenges of values education and broader constraints on curriculum implementation in Indonesian schools.

Student engagement and focus emerged as the primary obstacle. The teacher explained that "the obstacle in cultivating nationalist values actually depends on the students themselves. Student interest in learning is the key to students being able to receive all information related to learning, including applying it in daily life." While students were reported to be "quite enthusiastic" about the Proclamation material and recognised the importance of nationalist values, the teacher noted that some students lost interest after the initial stages of the lesson.

This finding is consistent with research on student engagement in Indonesian history education, which has identified declining student interest as a persistent challenge (Fahrudin & Saefudin, 2025). The teacher attributed this to students' familiarity with digital technology and their preference for more interactive and visually engaging content. However, the teacher's response to this challenge, using video and PowerPoint as media, while helpful, did not fundamentally address the deeper issue of student engagement with historical content.

Limited explicit curriculum guidance constituted a second obstacle. The teacher noted that there was no curriculum that specifically regulated the cultivation of nationalist values. While the Merdeka Curriculum includes character education dimensions in the Pancasila Student Profile, teachers did not receive clear guidance on how these dimensions should be operationalised in history instruction. This absence of explicit guidance created ambiguity about expectations and reduced pressure to prioritise nationalist values cultivation.

Assessment challenges constituted a third obstacle. The teacher noted that affective learning, including nationalist attitudes and values, was "difficult to measure." This difficulty led to minimal systematic assessment of nationalist outcomes, which in turn reduced the seriousness with which nationalist objectives were pursued. This finding

reflects broader challenges of assessing affective and value-based learning in education systems that prioritise cognitive outcomes (Oteng et al., 2023).

Time constraints constituted a fourth obstacle. The teacher reported that the pressure to cover extensive curriculum content limited the time available for in-depth exploration of nationalist values. The Discovery Learning model, which enables deeper engagement with complex issues, required significant time that was not always available given the demands of the curriculum.

Discussion

The Superficiality of Nationalist Values Cultivation

The findings of this study reveal a significant gap between the aspirations of nationalist values education and its realisation in history classrooms at SMA Negeri 1 Gondang. While the teacher demonstrates commitment to fostering nationalism, the cultivation remains superficial, characterised by transmission-oriented pedagogy that presents nationalism as an unproblematic value to be absorbed rather than a contested historical construct requiring critical engagement.

This superficiality manifests in several ways. First, nationalist values are added to existing instruction without changing its fundamental structure or assumptions. The teacher uses the Proclamation narrative as a vehicle for transmitting values but does not enable students to examine how the nationalist narrative has been constructed, whose perspectives are included, and whose are marginalised. Second, values cultivation focuses primarily on behavioural outcomes, including discipline and compliance, without addressing the deeper cognitive and ethical dimensions of nationalism. Third, values cultivation remains implicit rather than explicit, with the teacher not articulating specific learning objectives for nationalist values or assessing nationalist outcomes systematically.

This superficiality reflects broader patterns in Indonesian history education, where the legacy of New Order historiography continues to shape pedagogical practice (Awgichew & Ademe, 2022; Vickers, 2023). The transmission-oriented approach to nationalist values cultivation reproduces the authoritarian nationalism of the New Order era, which presented nationalism as a fixed, unquestionable value to be internalised rather than a dynamic, contested concept to be interrogated.

The superficiality also reflects the limitations of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation. While the curriculum emphasises student-centred learning and critical thinking, the absence of explicit guidance on how to cultivate nationalist values, combined with limited teacher professional development, has resulted in continuity with previous practices rather than transformation. This finding is consistent with research on the Merdeka Curriculum, which has identified obstacles in its implementation, including the lack of alternative learning strategies for developing historical thinking skills (Geshere et al., 2025).

The Post-Colonial Dimensions of Nationalist Values Cultivation

The challenges of nationalist values cultivation in Indonesian history education must be understood within the country's post-colonial trajectory. Indonesia's history education system has been repeatedly shaped by state interests, from the anti-colonial nationalism

of the independence movement to the authoritarian nationalism of the New Order regime (Pratama, 2022; Rachman et al., 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on the Pancasila Student Profile represents an attempt to move beyond this instrumental approach while maintaining the nation-building function of education.

However, the tension between cultivating critical historical consciousness and inculcating prescribed nationalist values remains unresolved in practice. The teacher in this study emphasised behavioural compliance and the transmission of prescribed values while struggling to address the curriculum's more ambitious cognitive and ethical dimensions. This pattern reflects what scholars term "epistemic dependency" on state-centred narratives (Pratama, 2022; Smets, 2024), where the reproduction of official history and prescribed values takes precedence over critical engagement.

The post-colonial context also shapes the specific manifestations of nationalist values cultivation in Indonesia. Unlike nationalism education in Western contexts, which often addresses the complexities of multicultural citizenship, Indonesian nationalism education operates within a framework of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* that emphasises national unity while acknowledging diversity. This framework creates distinctive tensions: the need to acknowledge diversity while maintaining national cohesion; the challenge of addressing historical injustices within a narrative of national harmony; and the tension between religious pluralism and the dominance of Islam in public life.

These tensions were evident in the present study. The teacher emphasised unity and discipline while not addressing the complexities of Indonesia's diverse society or the historical injustices that have shaped intergroup relations. The Proclamation narrative was presented as a story of national unity without acknowledging the competing visions for Indonesia's future that have existed throughout its history. This silence reflects broader patterns in Indonesian history education, where difficult histories are often avoided in favour of narratives of national unity and progress (Shah, 2023).

Teacher Agency and Professional Development

The study reveals the central role of teacher agency in navigating the challenges of nationalist values cultivation. The teacher in this study was not a passive recipient of reform but an active agent who made sense of nationalist values education, adapted it to the context, and developed strategies for addressing implementation obstacles. This finding aligns with research emphasising the importance of teacher agency in curriculum change, where teachers' interpretations, adaptations, and innovations shape implementation outcomes (Smith et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2023).

However, teacher agency operated within significant constraints. The absence of systematic professional development left the teacher to make sense of nationalist values cultivation on her own, a process that (Fullan, 2025) describes as fraught with the risk of superficial understanding. The teacher's reliance on existing practices and intuitive judgments, while demonstrating initiative, could not compensate for the absence of structured professional development opportunities that would enable deeper engagement with the principles and practices of values education.

The study also reveals the importance of professional development that is sustained, context-sensitive, and focused on pedagogical content knowledge. Research on effective professional development emphasises the need for ongoing support that addresses teachers' specific needs and contexts, rather than one-time workshops that provide

general information without follow-up (Cilliers et al., 2022; Lee & Vongkulluksn, 2023). In the Indonesian context, professional development for values education has been limited, with many teachers reporting insufficient preparation and support (Montessori et al., 2024; Rohmah et al., 2024).

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have several implications for policy and practice in nationalist values cultivation through history education. First, explicit curriculum guidance is needed to clarify expectations for nationalist values cultivation. The Merdeka Curriculum's Pancasila Student Profile, while including character education dimensions, does not provide sufficient guidance on how these dimensions should be operationalised in history instruction. Developing clear learning objectives, pedagogical strategies, and assessment approaches for nationalist values cultivation would support more systematic integration.

Second, sustained professional development is essential for enabling teachers to cultivate nationalist values effectively. Teachers require opportunities to develop pedagogical content knowledge for values education, including understanding of how nationalism has been historically constructed, strategies for engaging with multiple perspectives, and approaches for assessing values learning. Professional development should be sustained, context-sensitive, and focused on practice, enabling teachers to experiment with new approaches and receive feedback and support.

Third, critical engagement with historical narratives is essential for meaningful nationalist values cultivation. Teachers need support in moving beyond transmission-oriented pedagogy toward approaches that enable students to interrogate nationalist narratives, consider multiple perspectives, and develop their own critical understandings of nationalism. This requires engagement with critical pedagogy, post-colonial theory, and the specific histories of marginalisation and resistance that have shaped Indonesian society.

Fourth, assessment reform is needed to better capture students' nationalist understanding and commitment. Current assessment practices, which focus primarily on cognitive outcomes, do not adequately assess the affective and critical dimensions of nationalist values cultivation. Developing assessment approaches that capture students' capacity for critical reflection on nationalist narratives, their understanding of nationalism's historical construction, and their commitment to democratic values would support more serious attention to nationalist objectives.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. As a single-site case study, the findings are not statistically generalisable to other contexts, though they may offer insights applicable to similar Indonesian secondary schools. The relatively brief data collection period limited the depth of understanding that could be achieved; extended observation over a full academic year would enable richer understanding of how nationalist values cultivation evolves over time. The study focused on teachers' and students' perspectives but did not include systematic analysis of curriculum documents at the national level, which would illuminate the policy context shaping values education.

Future research should address these limitations through multi-site studies that examine nationalist values cultivation across diverse Indonesian contexts, including schools

with different demographic compositions, curriculum orientations, and institutional capacities. Longitudinal studies would enable understanding of how values cultivation develops over time and what factors support or constrain its development. Comparative studies across post-colonial contexts would illuminate how different national histories and educational traditions shape the possibilities and challenges of nationalist values education.

Additionally, research examining student learning outcomes more directly would strengthen understanding of whether and how nationalist values cultivation influences student development of national identity, civic engagement, and critical historical consciousness. Intervention studies testing specific pedagogical approaches to nationalist values education would provide evidence for effective practice. Research on the role of school leadership in supporting values education would illuminate how leadership practices shape implementation outcomes.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the cultivation of nationalist values through history education at SMA Negeri 1 Gondang, revealing a significant gap between policy aspirations and classroom practice. Despite the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on character education and the Pancasila Student Profile, nationalist values cultivation remains superficial, characterised by transmission-oriented pedagogy that presents nationalism as an unproblematic value to be absorbed rather than a contested historical construct requiring critical engagement.

The teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Gondang demonstrates commitment to fostering nationalism through the Proclamation of Independence narrative, yet the cultivation remains constrained by the absence of explicit learning objectives, limited professional development, the persistence of examination-oriented pedagogies, and the legacy of New Order historiography that presented nationalism as a fixed, unquestionable value. Students are expected to accept nationalist values as given rather than to interrogate their meaning, relevance, or limitations.

The obstacles to effective nationalist values cultivation reflect both the specific challenges of values education and broader constraints on curriculum implementation in Indonesian schools. Student engagement and focus, limited explicit curriculum guidance, assessment challenges, and time constraints all constrain the depth and quality of nationalist values cultivation. These obstacles are compounded by the post-colonial dynamics of Indonesian education, where the tension between cultivating critical historical consciousness and inculcating prescribed values remains unresolved.

The implications of this study extend beyond the Indonesian context. As educational systems worldwide grapple with the challenge of preparing students for citizenship in an era of globalisation, understanding how nationalist values are cultivated in specific institutional and cultural contexts becomes increasingly important. This study suggests that meaningful nationalist values cultivation requires moving beyond transmission toward critical pedagogy that enables students to interrogate nationalism's historical construction and contemporary relevance. It requires attention to the development of critical historical consciousness, not merely behavioural compliance. And it requires sustained investment in teacher professional development, curriculum resources, and institutional support.

Ultimately, this study argues that the cultivation of nationalist values through history education represents both a significant opportunity and a profound challenge for Indonesian education. The Proclamation of Independence narrative, with its themes of courage, unity, and sacrifice, provides rich material for values education. However, realising this potential requires more than policy mandates; it requires fundamental shifts in how teachers conceptualise history, nationalism, and the purposes of education. Without such shifts, nationalist values cultivation risks remaining a superficial addition to the curriculum, achieving behavioural compliance without critical consciousness, and patriotism without the capacity for reflective citizenship.

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