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Whom Do Students Imitate Now? *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha* and Influencer Role Models in the Digital Age

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Abstract: *Students increasingly take role models from social media influencers rather than from teachers, yet Indonesian character education research rarely examines this shift through indigenous pedagogical thought. This conceptual article reads influencer role modelling through Ki Hajar Dewantara's principle of* Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha *(the educator in front sets an example). This library research used a structured conceptual analysis with a theory-adaptation strategy: it interpreted the first volume of Dewantara's collected writings hermeneutically and analysed 61 substantive sources on parasocial relationships, influencers, moral exemplars, and Islamic education through content analysis. Five tuladha elements were derived from the Among System: family-like closeness, presence and reciprocity, harmony of thought, feeling, and will, responsibility, and orientation toward independence through Tri-N (*niteni, nirokke, nambahi*). Influencer role modelling fulfils closeness only illusorily, partially fulfils reciprocity and independence, does not fulfil responsibility, and cannot be assessed on harmony. The article terms this pattern truncated tuladha: influencers occupy the front position (*ing ngarsa*) but are rarely present in the middle (*ing madya*) or behind (*tut wuri*). It offers a five-element framework, three testable propositions, and an untested cycle of present tuladha for classroom practice. The same pattern may extend to religious influencers, so Islamic education teachers are strategically placed to revive* uswah hasanah*. Teachers are encouraged to become attainable exemplars and to use Tri-N for digital role-model literacy.*
Keywords: *Among System; character education; Islamic education; Ki Hajar Dewantara; parasocial relationship; social media influencer*

Abstrak: *Peserta didik kini semakin banyak mengambil teladan dari influencer media sosial daripada dari guru, tetapi kajian pendidikan karakter di Indonesia jarang membaca pergeseran ini melalui pemikiran pedagogi lokal. Artikel konseptual ini membaca keteladanan influencer melalui prinsip* Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha *Ki Hajar Dewantara. Studi pustaka ini memakai analisis konseptual terstruktur dengan strategi adaptasi teori. Jilid pertama kumpulan tulisan Dewantara ditafsirkan secara hermeneutis, sedangkan 61 sumber substantif tentang relasi parasosial, influencer, teladan moral, dan pendidikan Islam dianalisis dengan analisis isi kualitatif. Lima unsur tuladha diturunkan dari Sistem Among, yaitu kedekatan berjiwa kekeluargaan, kehadiran dan timbal balik, keselarasan pikiran, perasaan, dan kehendak, tanggung jawab atas tumbuhnya anak, serta arah menuju kemerdekaan melalui Tri-N (*niteni, nirokke, nambahi*). Keteladanan influencer memenuhi unsur kedekatan hanya secara semu, memenuhi sebagian unsur timbal balik dan kemerdekaan, tidak memenuhi unsur tanggung jawab, dan tidak dapat dinilai pada unsur keselarasan. Pola ini dirumuskan sebagai tuladha yang terpotong: influencer menempati posisi* ing ngarsa*, tetapi jarang hadir pada posisi* ing madya *dan* tut wuri*. Artikel menyumbangkan kerangka lima unsur, tiga proposisi yang dapat diuji, dan usulan siklus tuladha yang hadir bagi praktik kelas yang belum diuji. Pola yang sama dapat berlaku pada influencer religius, sehingga*

guru PAI berada pada posisi strategis untuk menghidupkan uswah hasanah*. Guru dianjurkan menjadi teladan yang dapat dijangkau dan memanfaatkan Tri-N sebagai pedagogi literasi keteladanan digital.*
Kata Kunci: *Sistem Among; pendidikan karakter; pendidikan Islam; Ki Hajar Dewantara; relasi parasosial; influencer media sosial*

Introduction

Whom do students imitate today? The question can no longer be answered simply by pointing to teachers, parents, or community figures. A national survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association recorded internet penetration of 80.66 percent, or roughly 229 million people, in 2025, with the highest rate, 87.80 percent, among Generation Z (APJII, 2025). This cohort, born roughly between 1997 and 2012, also includes young adults, but it encompasses all of today's junior and senior secondary students, so most of them can be assumed to be growing up with the internet and social media. For adolescents, these media are a space in which identities are built and reference figures are chosen (Pérez-Torres, 2024; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). In that space, YouTubers and content creators often become the favourite figures that children and adolescents wish to resemble (Lajnef, 2023; Tolbert & Drogos, 2019).

The influence of influencers can be explained through social learning theory. Bandura (1977) showed that people learn much of their behaviour by observing models, especially models perceived as attractive, high in status, and visibly rewarded for what they do. Influencers may meet all three conditions, since perceived attractiveness and popularity are among the main antecedents of their impact (J. Han & Balabanis, 2024; Tolbert & Drogos, 2019). A survey in five Middle Eastern countries found that influencers affect the intellectual, social, ethical, and health dimensions of adolescents' lives (Al-Ansi, 2023), and a study in Malaysia reported comparable effects on lifestyle, attitudes, and ethics (Tengku Mohammad & Abdul Manaf, 2025). Indonesian evidence points in the same direction, as a survey of adolescents in Makassar and Maros found that influencers indirectly affected risky behaviour through the dating styles adolescents adopted (Yusuf, 2021). A scoping review further shows that adolescents treat influencers as sources of health information, even though their expertise and commercial interests are open to question (Engel et al., 2024).

Influencer role modelling differs fundamentally from role modelling within an educational relationship. Horton and Wohl (1956) described the audience's relationship with media figures as parasocial interaction, which feels intimate but runs in one direction. Social media thickens this illusion of closeness because followers can comment, send messages, and occasionally receive a reply (Bond, 2016). Such parasocial relationships can be either beneficial or harmful to users' well-being (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). Moreover, the image that influencers present is usually curated and often tied to brand interests (Abidin, 2018), so what students actually emulate is a persona rather than a whole person.

Character education, on the other hand, has long placed role modelling among its principal methods. Lickona (1991) included the teacher as model in his strategies for school-based character education, and the neo-Aristotelian approach has reinforced this position through the idea of emulation (Kristjánsson, 2006). Sanderse (2013), however, argues that role modelling

in schools often remains implicit rather than being used as a deliberate method. Empirical work with children points in the same direction, since teachers were seldom among the role models children named, family members being chosen far more often (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007). Recent debate has gone further, questioning whether role modelling deserves to be a primary method at all (Carr, 2023) or remains valuable only insofar as it fosters students' autonomy and reflection (Athanassoulis & Han, 2023).

Research in moral psychology offers an important clue to this problem. Exemplars who feel close and attainable turn out to be more effective in promoting prosocial behaviour than extraordinary figures far removed from everyday life (H. Han & Dawson, 2024; H. Han et al., 2017). Emulation in adolescence is also better understood as a process of self-cultivation than as mere copying (Sanderse, 2024). Herein lies an irony. Influencers present themselves as close, peer-like, and seemingly attainable (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019), whereas teachers, as noted above, are not often named by students as role models. An Indonesian study of *ing ngarsa sung tuladha* likewise reports that teachers who seek to model values meet practical obstacles in daily school life (Turiyah et al., 2025). The competition over role modelling, then, concerns not only the content of values but also relational distance.

In Indonesia, character education has been institutionalised through Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 2017). More recent policy sets eight dimensions of the graduate profile, from faith to communication, as the graduate competency standard (Kemendikdasmen, 2025b). It has also launched the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children Movement (*Gerakan Tujuh Kebiasaan Anak Indonesia Hebat*), which rests on habituation and is set out in implementation guidelines such as those for primary schools (Kemendikdasmen, 2025a). Several scholars read Indonesian education policy since the *Merdeka Belajar* reforms as drawing on Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy (Cahyaningsih et al., 2025; Huda et al., 2024), although an analysis of the character education strengthening programme found that only part of his thought was adopted explicitly (Sutrisno & Zuchdi, 2023). Even so, these policies say far more about which habits should be formed than about who should model them.

For Ki Hajar Dewantara, role modelling never stands alone. He defines education as "*tuntunan di dalam hidup tumbuhnya anak-anak*", a guidance in the growing life of children that leads all the natural forces (*kodrat*) within them (Dewantara, 1977, p. 20), and he describes the educator's work with the Javanese words *momong, among,* and *ngemong*, that is, nurturing and caring for the child (Dewantara, 1977, p. 21). This is the core of the Among System (*Sistem Among*). Within it, the Taman Siswa motto *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani* places the educator in front as an example, in the middle as one who awakens the will, and behind as one who gives encouragement. The motto grew out of Dewantara's principle of *tut wuri handayani* and was completed as a three-part formula in Taman Siswa practice (Nugroho et al., 2018; Wijayanti, 2018). Studies in Taman Siswa primary schools show that teachers there practise the trilogy as one set of positions rather than as an isolated call for good examples (Nugroho et al., 2018; Sugiyanto et al., 2023). One recent review reads *tuladha* as a relationship that demands consistency of conduct and responsibility on the part of

the educator, not merely an image (Putri et al., 2025). It is precisely these elements that become questionable when the exemplar is present only through a screen.

Studies of *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha* in Indonesia are numerous, and most fall into two groups. The first group is normative, restating the relevance of the trilogy for teachers or for character education (Asiah et al., 2024; Sofiani et al., 2025; Wijayanti, 2018). The second group consists of implementation studies in particular schools, which describe how teachers practise the trilogy in Taman Siswa primary schools (Nugroho et al., 2018; Sugiyanto et al., 2023) or in a state junior secondary school (Turiyah et al., 2025). A bibliometric evaluation traces how Dewantara's ideas have been applied mainly to learning models and curriculum (Huda et al., 2024), and a recent review notes that his ideas are often repeated without being critically connected to contemporary moral education (Putri et al., 2025). The study closest to the present one is by Dewi et al. (2025), who revitalise the principle for the digital age by positioning teachers as moral exemplars both offline and online. Their analysis, however, concerns the teacher's own conduct in digital communication. It does not address influencers or parasocial relationships, nor does it ask which parts of the trilogy go missing when students' exemplars are media figures. This is the first gap addressed here.

The international literature on influencers, by contrast, has developed mainly in marketing (J. Han & Balabanis, 2024; Lou, 2022), health (Engel et al., 2024), and identity development (Pérez-Torres, 2024). Studies connecting it to character education remain scarce. One of them examined whether parasocial interaction mediates the link between influencers' online content and adolescents' prosocial moral reasoning and behaviour, and found that it does not (Brestovanský & Sekerešová, 2022). In the reviews of this field that we examined, the theoretical foundations come from Western communication science and psychology (Engel et al., 2024; J. Han & Balabanis, 2024), and pedagogical traditions from Indonesia or elsewhere in the Global South are not invoked. The search reported in the Method section found no study that reads parasocial role modelling through the framework of *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha* or the Among System, even though this framework was born of questions about the relationship between educator and student. This is the second gap.

The question is sharper still in Islamic education. Role modelling there has theological roots, since the Qur'an presents the Prophet as *uswah hasanah* (an excellent example), and Islamic education joins instruction with the cultivation of good conduct (*ta'dib*), in which exemplary conduct plays a central part (Halstead, 2004; Sanusi et al., 2024). At the same time, Indonesian Muslims increasingly practise their religion through social media (Slama, 2018), and young pious content creators have become religious influencers in their own right (Beta, 2019; Nisa, 2018). Teachers of Islamic religious education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*, PAI), who are expected to embody what they teach (Saepurrohman & Erihadiana, 2024), therefore face the same competition over role modelling as other teachers, but in a domain where the exemplar's integrity is itself part of the content. Whether the pattern found for influencers also applies to religious influencers has not been examined through Dewantara's framework either.

Building on these two gaps, this article examines the concept of *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha* in Ki Hajar Dewantara's writings and weighs it against the phenomenon of influencer role modelling. It pursues a theory-adaptation strategy, that is, extending the reach of a concept to

a new phenomenon (Jaakkola, 2020). Five questions guide the study, namely (1) how *tuladha* is understood within the framework of the Among System, (2) what characterises parasocial role modelling according to recent literature, (3) which elements of *tuladha* such role modelling fulfils and which it fails to fulfil, (4) how the resulting pattern bears on religious influencers and on role modelling in Islamic education, and (5) what model of practice for teachers and families follows from these answers. Questions 1 to 3 are answered in the first three subsections of the Results and Discussion, question 4 in the subsection on *uswah hasanah*, and question 5 in the subsections on the cycle of present *tuladha*, the family, and implications.

The novelty of this study lies in three contributions. First, to the best of our knowledge, it is the first study to read influencer role modelling through the Among System rather than through marketing or media-effects theories alone. Second, it introduces the concept of truncated *tuladha* together with a five-element analytical framework and three testable propositions. Third, it translates the framework into a cycle of present *tuladha* for classroom practice, offered as a proposal for future testing. Practically, the findings are intended to help teachers, including PAI teachers, parents, and policymakers design role modelling that offers what the screen lacks, namely a reciprocal relationship that cultivates students' independence.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach in the form of library research, that is, research whose data come entirely from written materials without field data collection (Zed, 2004). The design is a conceptual article using a theory-adaptation strategy (Jaakkola, 2020). The concept of *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha* serves as the lens for reading the phenomenon of influencer role modelling, while theories of parasocial relationships and moral modelling serve as comparative theories. Because the aim is to build and adapt concepts rather than to aggregate effects, the study is not a systematic review. It is better described as a structured conceptual analysis, in which sources are selected purposively and iteratively but the search, selection, and analytic steps are documented so that readers can trace them (Snyder, 2019). The procedure comprised five stages, namely search, selection, analysis in three strands, comparative synthesis, and model development (Figure 1).

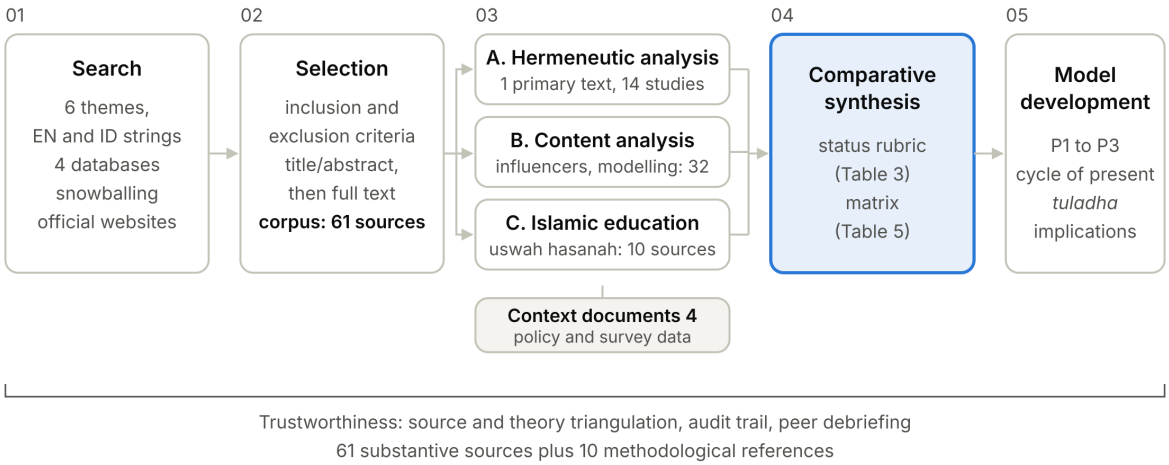


Figure 1. Stages of the structured conceptual analysis and the number of sources retained in each strand

The sources are grouped by their function in the analysis (Table 1). Following the logic of hermeneutic analysis, only Dewantara's own writing is treated as the primary text. Policy documents and survey data are treated separately as context documents, and the remaining literature as secondary sources.

Table 1. Data sources grouped by function in the analysis

Source group	Material	Function in the analysis
Primary text	Dewantara (1977), *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan*, particularly the essays on the Among System, *budi pekerti*, the Three Centres of Education, and the role of the *pamong*	Text interpreted hermeneutically to derive the elements of *tuladha*
Context documents	Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 2017); Ministerial Regulation No. 10 of 2025 on graduate competency standards (Kemendikdasmen, 2025b); guidelines for the Seven Habits Movement in primary schools (Kemendikdasmen, 2025a); APJII survey (APJII, 2025)	Policy context and students' digital conditions, not interpreted hermeneutically
Secondary sources: theory	Bandura (1977, 1986); Horton and Wohl (1956); Lickona (1991); Abidin (2017, 2018); Al-Attas (1980); Halstead (2004); Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2022)	Comparative theoretical frameworks
Secondary sources: research	Peer-reviewed articles on Dewantara's thought, parasocial relationships and influencers, moral exemplars, and role modelling in Islamic education (see Table 2)	Empirical and conceptual evidence for the content analysis

Journal articles published between 2016 and 2025 were prioritised to reflect recent developments in social media. Older sources were retained in two situations. The first is when they are classic references for theory or method, such as Horton and Wohl (1956), who introduced the concept of parasocial interaction. The second is when they remain a principal reference for a specific point on which later studies build, such as the conceptual analyses of emulation and role modelling (Kristjánsson, 2006; Sanderse, 2013), a widely cited philosophical analysis of Dewantara's educational thought (Suparlan, 2015), an empirical study of the role models children name (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007), an influential account of the Islamic concept of education (Halstead, 2004), and the standard typology of parental mediation (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Books were not restricted by year because they serve as theoretical sources. A few sources come from newer or less established journals (Asiah et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2025; Sanusi et al., 2024; Tengku Mohammad & Abdul Manaf, 2025). They are used only to illustrate points that other sources also support.

Data were collected through documentation (Bowen, 2009). The search drew on four databases, namely Scopus, Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Garuda, the Indonesian national index, and was limited to works published up to the end of 2025. Searches were organised by six themes, each with English strings and, for Garuda and Google Scholar, Indonesian strings (Table

2). Because the study is conceptual, the search was iterative. Database searches were complemented by backward and forward snowballing from key sources, and new concepts that emerged during the analysis, such as calibrated amateurism and religious influencers, triggered further targeted searches. Policy documents were retrieved directly from the websites of the ministry, the state legal database (peraturan.bpk.go.id), and APJII.

Table 2. Search themes, example strings, and sources retained

Theme	Example search strings (English; Indonesian)	Sources retained
1. Dewantara, *tuladha*, and the Among System	("Ki Hajar Dewantara" OR "Ki Hadjar Dewantara") AND (tuladha OR "role model" OR "Among System" OR niteni); ("Ki Hadjar Dewantara" OR "Ki Hajar Dewantara") AND (keteladanan OR "sistem among" OR "ing ngarsa sung tuladha" OR "niteni nirokke nambahi")	1 primary text and 14 secondary sources
2. Parasocial relationships and influencers among young people	(parasocial OR "para-social") AND (adolescen* OR youth OR influencer* OR YouTuber*); influencer AND (remaja OR "peserta didik")	13
3. Influencer practice, platforms, and mediation	"social media influencer*" AND (authenticity OR "calibrated amateurism" OR algorithm* OR "influencer marketing") AND (child* OR adolescen*); "parental mediation" AND internet	6
4. Moral exemplars and role modelling	("moral exemplar*" OR "role model*" OR emulation) AND ("character education" OR "moral education"); Lickona AND "Ki Hadjar Dewantara"	13
5. Islamic education and religious influencers	("uswah hasanah" OR qudwah OR "role model*") AND "Islamic education"; ("religious influencer*" OR "online preacher*" OR da'wa OR piety) AND "social media" AND Indonesia; keteladanan AND "pendidikan agama Islam"	10
6. Policy and context	Retrieved directly from official websites	4

Selection applied four inclusion criteria, namely (a) peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books or chapters, or official policy documents and survey reports; (b) written in Indonesian or English; (c) for journal articles, published from 2016 to 2025, with the exceptions explained above; and (d) substantive treatment of role modelling, parasocial relationships, influencers, Dewantara's thought, or role modelling in Islamic education. Sources were excluded if they were (a) news items, blogs, or other non-peer-reviewed web content other than official documents; (b) studies of influencer marketing that measured only purchase outcomes and had no bearing on young people or on modelling; (c) duplicate or derivative publications of an included study; or (d) unavailable in full text. Screening proceeded from titles and abstracts to full texts. Screening was carried out by the first author under the direct guidance of the second author, an experienced lecturer in the field, whose advice determined which sources were retained and which were set aside. Each retained source was recorded in an extraction matrix containing its identity, key concepts, main argument, and findings. The final corpus consists of 61 substantive sources, namely the primary text, 4 context documents, and 56 secondary

sources (48 journal articles, 6 books, 1 framework report, and 1 book chapter), together with 10 methodological references.

The analysis proceeded along three strands. The first was a hermeneutic analysis of Dewantara's text, carried out in four steps (Gadamer, 2004). First, the essays on the Among System, *budi pekerti*, the Three Centres of Education, and the duties of the *pamong* were read in full, and every passage concerning example, closeness, guidance, or the child's independence was marked. Second, each marked passage was read against the historical horizon of the text, namely Javanese culture, colonial education, and the founding of Taman Siswa in 1922, and against the volume as a whole, moving back and forth between part and whole in a hermeneutic circle. Third, the horizon of the text was brought into dialogue with the horizon of the present problem by asking what each passage requires of an exemplar. This fusion of horizons produced candidate elements of *tuladha*. Fourth, each candidate was tested against the text by checking whether it could be anchored in at least one passage in the original terms, and candidates without such an anchor were dropped or merged. The resulting elements and their textual anchors are shown in Table 4.

The second strand was a qualitative content analysis of the secondary literature on influencers and moral modelling (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendorff, 2019). The unit of analysis was a claim or finding about the relationship between a model and its audience. The coding frame was developed deductively from the first strand, with five main codes corresponding to the candidate elements (closeness, presence and reciprocity, harmony of conduct, responsibility, and orientation toward independence). It was then enriched inductively with subcodes such as perceived intimacy, calibrated authenticity, algorithmic visibility, and attainability, which later became the four characteristics of parasocial role modelling. For example, the finding that followers can comment and occasionally receive a reply (Bond, 2016) was coded under presence and reciprocity, subcode one-to-many interaction. The third strand applied the same frame to the sources on Islamic education and religious influencers, so that the comparison between *tuladha* and *uswah hasanah* used the same categories.

The strands were brought together in a comparative-conceptual synthesis. Each element of *tuladha* was mapped against the characteristics of parasocial role modelling and assigned one of five statuses according to the rubric in Table 3, and the results were displayed in a matrix to make the comparison visible (Miles et al., 2014). The status of each element was assigned by the first author using the rubric and then examined by the second author, whose corrections were incorporated into the final judgements.

Table 3. Rubric for assigning the status of each element

Status	Definition	Indicator in the literature
Fulfilled	The element is present in the relationship in the form Dewantara describes	Studies show the element operating in both directions and over time
Illusorily fulfilled	The element is experienced by the follower but is not reciprocated by the model	Studies report felt intimacy or familiarity although the model does not know the follower

Status	Definition	Indicator in the literature
Partially fulfilled	Some features of the element are present, while others are absent or occasional	Studies report the feature only for some influencers, platforms, or interactions, or only for some stages of the element
Not fulfilled	The structure of the relationship works against the element	Studies show incentives or practices that run counter to the element
Cannot be assessed	The literature provides no evidence on which to judge the element	No study observes the relevant conduct, for example conduct off screen

The synthesis was then developed into a model in three steps, following the logic of theory adaptation (Jaakkola, 2020). The results of the mapping were first stated as three formal propositions (P1 to P3) that can be tested empirically. The propositions were then combined with Tri-N and the formula *ngerti, ngrasa, nglakoni* to construct the cycle of present *tuladha*. Lastly, implications for teachers, families, and policy were derived from the elements that the matrix shows to be missing. The cycle has not been validated by experts or tested in classrooms, and it is presented as a proposal.

Trustworthiness was pursued through the criteria of credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Source triangulation meant that each interpretation of the primary text was compared with at least two secondary readings of Dewantara. Theory triangulation meant that each characteristic of parasocial role modelling was read through more than one framework, namely parasocial theory, social learning theory, and neo-Aristotelian accounts of emulation (Patton, 1999). An audit trail was kept, consisting of the extraction matrix, records of selection decisions, and analytic memos, and is available from the corresponding author on request. Peer debriefing took the form of a class presentation in which the preliminary interpretations were set before the first author's classmates, who acted as critical respondents. Their questions, suggestions, and corrections were used to revise the analysis, and the revised version was then refined further by the second author.

Results and Discussion

This examination yields three main findings, which answer the first three research questions, while the later subsections answer the fourth and fifth. First, *tuladha* in Ki Hajar Dewantara's thought is not a behaviour to be copied but one position within a nurturing relationship that moves toward the student's independence. Second, influencer role modelling rests on perceived intimacy, calibrated authenticity, the logic of visibility, and attainability. Third, of the five elements of *tuladha*, parasocial role modelling fulfils closeness only illusorily, partially fulfils two elements, does not fulfil one, and cannot be assessed on the last.

Tuladha within the framework of the Among System

In Ki Hajar Dewantara's writings, *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha* never appears on its own. It is paired with *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa* and *Tut Wuri Handayani*, so role modelling is only one of three positions that the educator takes according to the student's needs (Sugiyanto et al., 2023; Wijayanti, 2018). In Dewantara's own writing the weight falls on the last position, since educators

stay "*di belakang mereka sebagai penasehat dan sebagai pemimpin-pemimpin*", behind the pupils as advisers and leaders (Dewantara, 1977, p. 59). These positions operate within the Among System, which Dewantara set against education based on *regering, tucht en orde* (command, punishment, and order) and grounded instead in *orde en vrede*, order and peace (Dewantara, 1977, pp. 13–14). The freedom he sought for children has three aspects, namely standing on one's own (*berdiri sendiri*), not depending on others (*tidak tergantung kepada orang lain*), and being able to govern oneself (*dapat mengatur dirinya sendiri*) (Dewantara, 1977, p. 4). Studies of Taman Siswa primary schools show that teachers still read the three positions in this way, moving from being an example to motivating and then encouraging students according to their natural development (Nugroho et al., 2018; Sugiyanto et al., 2023). In our reading, the consequence is that the exemplar in front is not meant to make students dependent. It is a point of departure that is later replaced by encouragement from the middle and from behind, once students are able to stand on their own (Ferary, 2023).

The aim of *tuladha* is also broader than outward behaviour. Dewantara defines *budi pekerti* (character) as "*bersatunya gerak pikiran, perasaan dan kehendak atau kemauan, yang lalu menimbulkan tenaga*", the unity of the movements of thought, feeling, and will that gives rise to strength, with *budi* standing for thought, feeling, and will and *pekerti* for the energy they produce (Dewantara, 1977, p. 25). The formula *ngerti, ngrasa, nglakoni* (understanding, feeling, doing) is commonly attributed to Dewantara and to Taman Siswa teaching in the secondary literature (Suparlan, 2015; Wijayanti, 2018), and we treat it here as a Taman Siswa formula rather than as a quotation from the volume we analysed. What is modelled, therefore, is not merely action but the harmony between what the educator thinks, feels, and does. This reading is close to the neo-Aristotelian view that emulation targets admired virtues rather than the imitation of movements (Kristjánsson, 2006).

Tri-N, *niteni, nirokke, nambahi* (observing, imitating, adding), is likewise a Taman Siswa teaching that the literature commonly attributes to Dewantara (Andayani et al., 2021; Wijayanti, 2018). It places imitation as the middle stage. Students first observe carefully, then imitate, and finally rework what they have imitated on their own initiative. For young children, a similar formula appears as *nonton, niteni, nirokke* (watching, observing, imitating) (Suparlan, 2015). Social learning theory explains how imitation proceeds through attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1986). Read alongside it, Tri-N can be interpreted, in our view, as adding a normative direction, namely that good imitation should culminate in *nambahi*, the capacity to create that marks the student's independence.

Tuladha is also not the burden of the teacher alone. The Three Centres of Education (*Tri Pusat Pendidikan*) distribute educational responsibility across *alam keluarga* (the family), *alam perguruan* (the school), and *alam pergerakan pemuda* (the youth movement), which he calls "*tiga tempat pergaulan yang menjadi pusat pendidikan yang amat penting*", three settings of association that are the most important centres of education (Dewantara, 1977, p. 70). By the youth movement, Dewantara meant the associations that young people form among themselves outside home and school. He included it among the centres of education because it supports young people's social conduct (*laku sosial*), and he wanted teachers to be present in it as advisers (Dewantara, 1977, pp. 70–74). We propose, as an interpretive inference rather than a

claim found in Dewantara, that social media now functions as a new form of this youth milieu, a space of association that shapes adolescents' tastes, identities, and values (Pérez-Torres, 2024; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). The analogy has a limit. The youth movements Dewantara knew remained within reach of the *pamong* (educators acting as guardians), who were meant to accompany them as advisers, whereas what young people see online is now ordered largely by platform algorithms (Cotter, 2019).

From this reading, the study derives five elements of *tuladha* as analytical categories, namely (1) family-like closeness, (2) presence and reciprocity, (3) harmony of thought, feeling, and will, (4) responsibility for the child's growth in accordance with their nature, and (5) an orientation toward the student's independence through *niteni, nirokke, nambahi*. Table 4 shows the textual anchor for each element and the secondary sources that support our reading. The selection of these elements is our interpretation. We arrived at five because each candidate had to meet two conditions, namely being anchored in the text and being observable, at least in principle, in a relationship between a model and a learner. A candidate that failed the second condition, the cultural rootedness expressed in the *trikon* principle, was kept for the discussion but not used as a row of the matrix. Candidates that overlapped, such as consistency of conduct and harmony of thought, feeling, and will, were merged.

Table 4. Derivation of the five elements of *tuladha*

Element	Textual anchor in Dewantara (1977)	Secondary support
1. Family-like closeness	The educator's work is described as *momong, among,* and *ngemong*, nurturing and caring for the child as in a family, p. 21	Ferary (2023); Nugroho et al. (2018)
2. Presence and reciprocity	Educators stay "*di belakang mereka sebagai penasehat dan sebagai pemimpin-pemimpin*", accompanying pupils as advisers (*tut wuri handayani*), p. 59	Sugiyanto et al. (2023); Turiyah et al. (2025)
3. Harmony of thought, feeling, and will	*Budi pekerti* as "*bersatunya gerak pikiran, perasaan dan kehendak atau kemauan, yang lalu menimbulkan tenaga*", p. 25	Suparlan (2015); Wijayanti (2018)
4. Responsibility for the child's growth	Education as "*tuntunan di dalam hidup tumbuhnya anak-anak*", guiding the natural forces (*kodrat*) of the child, p. 20	Cahyaningsih et al. (2025); Putri et al. (2025)
5. Orientation toward independence	Freedom as "*berdiri sendiri*", "*tidak tergantung kepada orang lain*", and "*dapat mengatur dirinya sendiri*", p. 4; Tri-N as Taman Siswa teaching	Andayani et al. (2021); Wijayanti (2018)

Characteristics of parasocial role modelling by influencers

The first characteristic is an asymmetry that feels intimate. Horton and Wohl (1956) called it intimacy at a distance, in which audiences feel they know the media figure while the figure does not know them. Social media narrows this distance without eliminating it. Lou (2022) describes the relationship between influencers and followers as trans-parasocial because interaction does occur, yet it remains unequal and runs from one to many. Among adolescents, such interaction in fact strengthens parasocial relationships (Bond, 2016).

The second characteristic is calibrated authenticity. Abidin (2017) shows that the impression of naturalness in influencer content is often the product of deliberate work, which she calls calibrated amateurism. Seemingly spontaneous everyday moments are selected, arranged, and presented to sustain follower engagement (Abidin, 2018). As a result, followers see a consistent front stage but have no means of testing whether the conduct behind the screen matches what is displayed.

The third characteristic is the logic of visibility and commerce. Influencers operate in a "visibility game" whose rules are set by platform algorithms (Cotter, 2019). Their influence has also become a marketing commodity whose antecedents and mechanisms have been mapped meta-analytically (J. Han & Balabanis, 2024). Children and adolescents are vulnerable in this ecosystem because their ability to recognise advertising embedded in content is not yet mature (De Veirman et al., 2019). In the health domain, a similar problem arises when influencers become sources of information without adequate expertise (Engel et al., 2024).

The fourth characteristic is attainability. Children tend to choose YouTubers of the same gender who are funny and popular as the favourite figures they wish to resemble (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019), although this evidence comes from tweens in the United States and should be generalised to Indonesian students with caution. Social media also becomes a mirror in which adolescents build their identities through identification with reference figures (Pérez-Torres, 2024). This influence is not always negative. Several surveys even report positive effects on adolescents' attitudes and knowledge (Al-Ansi, 2023; Tengku Mohammad & Abdul Manaf, 2025), while Indonesian evidence shows influencers shaping adolescents' dating standards (Yusuf, 2021). These findings suggest that the problem lies not solely in the content but in the form of the role-modelling relationship.

Elements of tuladha in parasocial role modelling

Table 5 maps the five elements of *tuladha* against the characteristics of parasocial role modelling, using the rubric in Table 3.

Table 5. Synthesis matrix of the elements of *tuladha* and parasocial role modelling

Element of *tuladha* (Dewantara)	Characteristic of parasocial role modelling	Status	Key references
1. Family-like closeness	Intimacy is strongly felt but built in one direction	Illusorily fulfilled	Horton & Wohl (1956); Lou (2022); Tolbert & Drogos (2019)
2. Presence and reciprocity	Interaction is real but one-to-many; replies are occasional, selective, and visible to all followers	Partially fulfilled	Bond (2016); Hoffner & Bond (2022); Lou (2022)
3. Harmony of thought, feeling, and will	Curated persona; consistency between conduct on and off screen cannot be verified by followers or by research	Cannot be assessed	Abidin (2017, 2018)

Element of *tuladha* (Dewantara)	Characteristic of parasocial role modelling	Status	Key references
4. Responsibility for the child's growth	Orientation toward visibility, engagement, and brands rather than toward the follower's growth	Not fulfilled	Cotter (2019); De Veirman et al. (2019); J. Han & Balabanis (2024)
5. Orientation toward independence (*niteni, nirokke, nambahi*)	Content invites observation and imitation; support for followers' own creation (*nambahi*) is not documented and is the authors' argument	Partially fulfilled	Tolbert & Drogos (2019); Pérez-Torres (2024)

The matrix reveals a consistent pattern. Influencer role modelling is strongest on closeness, even though that closeness is illusory because it rests on one-sided familiarity. Presence and the orientation toward independence are only partially fulfilled, responsibility is not fulfilled, and harmony cannot be assessed because followers have no access to conduct off screen. When the pattern is compared with teachers, two levels need to be kept apart. In the ideal of the Among System, closeness is the first element of the *pamong*'s role. In actual practice, however, there are signs that teachers are not the figures students feel closest to. Children seldom name teachers among their role models (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007), and an Indonesian implementation study describes teachers' role modelling mainly in terms of punctuality, classroom management, and courteous conduct rather than personal closeness (Turiyah et al., 2025). Systematic data on how close Indonesian students feel to their teachers compared with influencers are still lacking, so this contrast remains a hypothesis to be tested. By analogy, research on moral exemplars suggests why closeness may be decisive, since in experiments exemplars who are relatable and attainable elicit more elevation than ideal but distant ones (H. Han & Dawson, 2024).

This pattern can be summarised in the concept of truncated *tuladha*. The exemplar occupies the *ing ngarsa* position, standing in front and being seen, but is rarely present in the *ing madya* position, awakening students' will through personal dialogue, and seldom reaches the *tut wuri* position, supporting students until they become independent. In terms of Tri-N, digital space facilitates *niteni* and *nirokke* effectively but, as far as the literature shows, rarely brings students to *nambahi*. The word "rarely" is deliberate. Some educational influencers answer questions, hold live sessions, and guide their followers, and in doing so they partly perform *ing madya*. The claim concerns the typical structure of the relationship, not every influencer (Figure 2). It leads to the first proposition.

> **P1.** The more a student's main exemplars are parasocial rather than present in person, the more the student's engagement with them will consist of observation and imitation (*niteni* and *nirokke*) rather than of the student's own reworking of the modelled behaviour (*nambahi*).

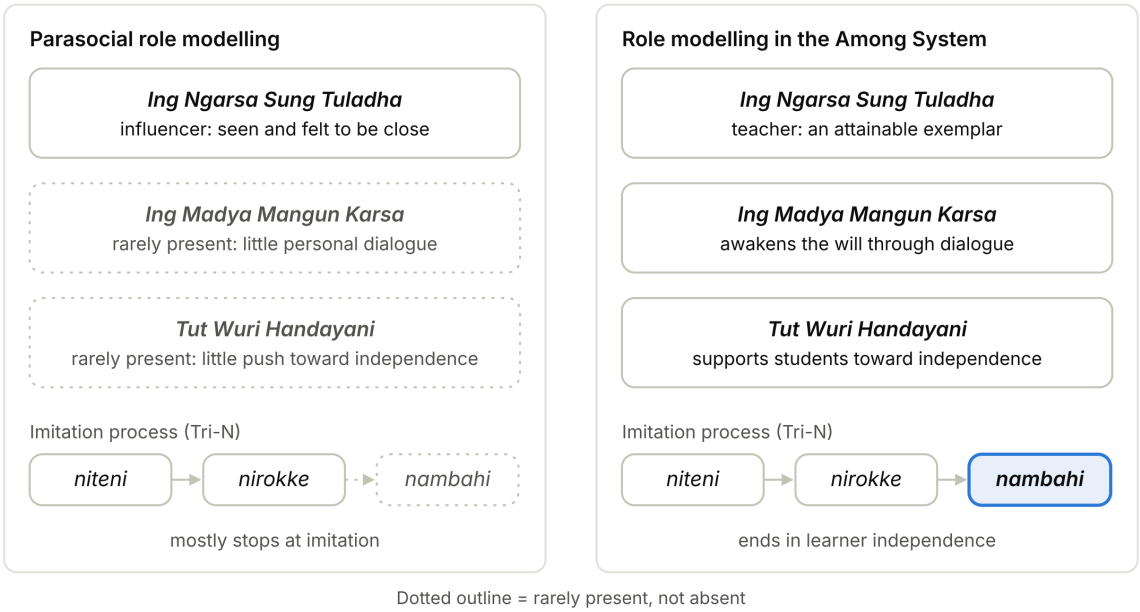


Figure 2. Conceptual model of truncated *tuladha*: parasocial role modelling compared with role modelling in the Among System

Applying the positions of an educator to influencers raises a category problem, since influencers do not intend to educate, whereas the Among System presupposes the *pamong*'s intention to guide. We address this objection in two ways. First, the analysis does not claim that influencers are failed educators. It uses the three positions as an analytical lens to describe which educative functions are present in a relationship from the student's side, regardless of the model's intention. Second, social learning theory shows that modelling effects occur whether or not the model intends them (Bandura, 1977), so students may treat influencers as exemplars even when influencers do not see themselves as such (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019). The concept of truncated *tuladha* thus describes what students receive, not what influencers mean to give.

The second proposition concerns the debate on moral modelling. Carr (2023) worries that modelling easily slides into manipulative shaping and treats it at best as an auxiliary phenomenon, whereas Athanassoulis and Han (2023) maintain that modelling remains valuable as long as it aims at students' self-cultivation and autonomy. In the literature we searched, we found no treatment of this debate in relation to Dewantara or other non-Western pedagogies. Dewantara's framework offers a perspective worth adding. Because *tuladha* is always paired with *tut wuri handayani* and, through Tri-N, directed toward *nambahi*, role modelling in the Among System is designed to release students rather than to bind them, in line with his aim that children become able to stand on their own and govern themselves (Dewantara, 1977, p. 4). This design does not dissolve Carr's concern, since a *pamong* can still manipulate. It does, however, offer a criterion for distinguishing modelling that releases from modelling that binds.

> **P2.** Role modelling that is accompanied by dialogue (*ing madya*) and by the gradual withdrawal of the model (*tut wuri*) will be associated with greater autonomy in students' moral judgement than role modelling that relies on display alone.

The third proposition relates to the Three Centres of Education. If social media is understood as today's youth milieu, the issue is not how to keep students away from that space

but how to bring the *pamong* into it. Dewantara dealt with outside cultural influences selectively through the *trikon* principle of continuity, convergence, and concentricity, which he formulated in his writings on culture and which Suparlan (2015) summarises. The same principle can be applied to digital culture, not by rejecting it but by filtering and processing it so that it remains rooted in the student's own personality. In practice, a teacher who brings a popular creator's video into class and discusses with students what to keep, what to adapt, and what to leave is acting as a *pamong* in the digital youth milieu.

> **P3.** Students whose teachers and parents regularly discuss influencer content with them will evaluate that content more critically than students whose exposure is only restricted or left unaccompanied.

Comparison with previous studies and frameworks

These findings confirm, extend, and qualify earlier work. They confirm the argument of Dewi et al. (2025) that the digital age requires *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha* to be revitalised, but they extend it from the teacher's own online conduct to the competing exemplars that students follow. They extend Sanderse (2013), who argues that role modelling should be made deliberate and accompanied by explanation, by identifying the relational elements that such deliberate modelling needs. They are consistent with the experimental finding that attainable exemplars move people more than distant ones (H. Han & Dawson, 2024; H. Han et al., 2017), but they qualify it, since attainability alone, which influencers possess, is not sufficient without the other elements of *tuladha*. Finally, they offer a partial answer to Carr (2023), as discussed above, while accepting that his concern about manipulation remains open.

Lickona's components of character have often been compared with Dewantara's conception of character education in Indonesian studies (Hikmasari et al., 2021), and the resemblance between *ngerti, ngrasa, nglakoni* and moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action in Lickona's (1991) framework is therefore not claimed here as new. What the present analysis adds is attention to where character is formed. Lickona formulates components inherent in the student, whereas Dewantara situates all three within a nurturing relationship imbued with a family spirit (Ferary, 2023). For Dewantara, *budi pekerti* grows between the *pamong* and the student, not merely within the student.

The Jubilee Centre framework provides a further point of comparison. It states that virtue can be caught through school culture, relationships, and exemplars, taught through deliberate instruction, and sought when students consciously pursue virtue for themselves (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2022). The three routes partly parallel Dewantara's trilogy, but the fit is uneven and should be read as our analogy. The parallel holds best between sought and *tut wuri handayani*, since both describe a stage in which students take the initiative and the educator supports from behind. It holds only partly between caught and *ing ngarsa*, because caught includes school culture and relationships, not exemplars alone. It holds least between taught and *ing madya*, because *mangun karsa* means awakening the will, which is closer to dialogue and motivation than to instruction. The comparison therefore reveals a difference of emphasis more than a correspondence. The Jubilee Centre classifies the routes by which virtue is acquired, whereas Dewantara formulated positions for the educator, so the question always returns to where the educator stands in relation to the student (Kristjánsson, 2006; Sanderse,

2024). In this light, influencers can supply material that is caught, but the literature reviewed offers little evidence that they perform the dialogical or guided functions that the other routes require.

Tuladha and uswah hasanah: An Islamic education perspective

In Islamic education, role modelling has strong theological roots. The Qur'an describes the Prophet as *uswah hasanah*, an excellent example, in the following verse.

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

> "Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for whoever hopes in Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah often" (Q.S. Al-Ahzab [33]: 21, authors' translation).

This verse is commonly taken as the basis of the exemplary method, which holds a central place among the methods of Islamic education (Sanusi et al., 2024). An influential account of Islamic education likewise describes it as encompassing *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*, that is, nurture, instruction, and the cultivation of good conduct (Halstead, 2004). The concept of *qudwah* emphasises the congruence between an educator's words and deeds as a main indicator of a teacher's personal competence (Saepurrohman & Erihadiana, 2024). This emphasis meets directly with the third element of *tuladha*, the harmony of thought, feeling, and will. Al-Attas (1980) goes further by defining Islamic education as *ta'dib*, the instilling of *adab*, so that the educator's own *adab* becomes part of the very content of education. Studies of Dewantara's concept of education have also identified Islamic educational values within it (Sofiani et al., 2025), which gives the dialogue between *tuladha* and *uswah hasanah* a footing, although the present analysis does not depend on that claim.

Digital space poses particular challenges for religious role modelling. Indonesian Muslims increasingly rely on social media in practising their religion (Slama, 2018), and religious authority has spread to apps and to the accounts of popular preachers (Fakhruroji, 2019). Research on Indonesia has also documented religious influencers directly. Beta (2019) shows how young Muslim women's groups act as religious influencers who combine piety, commerce, and politics, and Nisa (2018) describes how female Muslim youth use the visual culture of Instagram for creative and lucrative *da'wa*. These figures widen students' access to Islamic teachings, yet they work with the same media logic as other influencers. Husein and Slama (2018) note that online piety has revived anxieties about *riya'*, the showing off of piety, which is strongly condemned in Islamic theology. The problem of *riya'* parallels calibrated authenticity (Abidin, 2017), as both concern the gap between displayed conduct and actual conduct.

Religious role modelling on screen is thus not automatically free from the pattern of truncated *tuladha*. Digital preachers may occupy the *ing ngarsa* position for millions of followers, and some respond to followers in two-way sessions, which partly performs *ing madya*. A relationship in which teacher and student know each other and which unfolds gradually over years, however, cannot simply be transferred to the screen. Murjani (2025) stresses that the conduct of PAI teachers in both the real and the virtual world serves as a model for students, and that the main challenge is maintaining consistent integrity amid digital temptations. Building

on this, the present article argues that PAI teachers may occupy a strategic position because they can combine religious authority with sustained relational presence. Not every PAI teacher holds the same authority, however, and this argument remains to be tested empirically.

The cycle of present tuladha

The three propositions can be integrated into an operational model called the cycle of present *tuladha* (Figure 3). The model is our construct, offered as a proposal that has not yet been validated by experts or tested in classrooms. It places the student at the centre and describes four recurring phases. The first three phases follow Tri-N, and each is paired with one position of the trilogy. In the *niteni* phase, the teacher stands in front (*ing ngarsa*) as an attainable exemplar while helping students observe digital exemplars critically. In the *nirokke* phase, the teacher moves to the middle (*ing madya*). Imitation is paired with the middle position because, in the Among System, imitation should be chosen rather than automatic, and choosing what is worth imitating is exactly where the will needs to be awakened through dialogue. In the *nambahi* phase, the teacher steps behind (*tut wuri*) and gives students room to create. The fourth phase, *ngrasa*, is borrowed from the second triad, *ngerti, ngrasa, nglakoni*. We add it because Tri-N contains no explicit moment of reflection, whereas *ngrasa* names the felt evaluation of one's own conduct that closes the loop. In this phase the teacher stands beside the student as a dialogue partner, which is again the *ing madya* position.

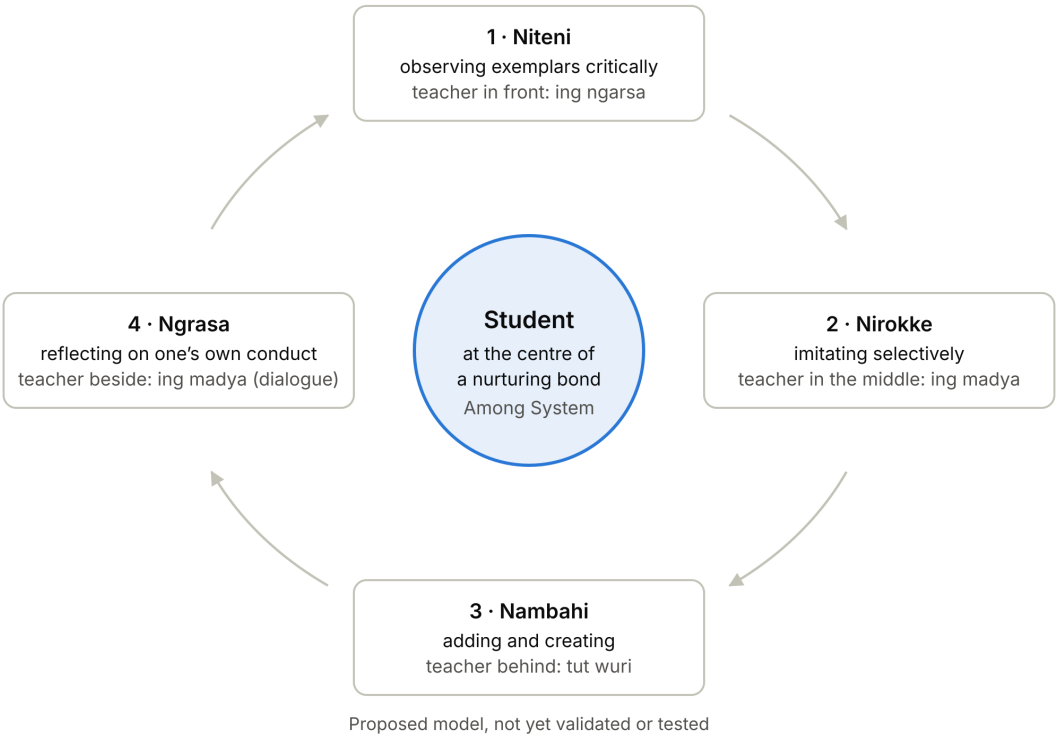


Figure 3. The cycle of present *tuladha*: the student at the centre, the teacher shifting position in each phase

A cyclical form was chosen for two reasons. First, the Among System does not treat role modelling as a one-off event but as guidance that continually adjusts to the child's growth. Second, the cycle responds to the argument in the moral education literature that good emulation requires reflection and autonomy (Athanassoulis & Han, 2023; Sanderse, 2024).

Within this cycle, teachers do not compete with influencers. Influencer content instead becomes material that students process, just as the *nambahi* stage of Tri-N is directed toward fostering a creative attitude (Andayani et al., 2021). Table 6 gives indicative classroom steps and indicators for each phase, using a sponsored video by a popular creator as the example.

Table 6. Indicative classroom steps and indicators for the cycle of present *tuladha*

Phase (teacher's position)	Example of a classroom activity	Indicator of success
Niteni (in front, *ing ngarsa*)	The teacher shows a short sponsored video by a popular creator and models how to notice the disclosure, the editing, and the message	Students identify sponsorship cues and distinguish displayed conduct from conduct that can be verified
Nirokke (in the middle, *ing madya*)	Students list what they admire in the creator and discuss in small groups which traits are worth imitating and why	Students give reasons for accepting or rejecting a trait that refer to values rather than to popularity
Nambahi (behind, *tut wuri*)	Students produce a short piece of content or a personal plan that adapts an admired trait to their own lives, with the teacher giving feedback only on request	The product shows a personal adaptation rather than a copy
Ngrasa (beside the student, *ing madya*)	Students write a brief reflection on how the activity changed their view of the creator and of themselves	The reflection shows self-evaluation and a stated intention to act

The family as pamong in the digital youth milieu

The cycle does not apply only at school. Within the Three Centres of Education, the family is the first centre (Dewantara, 1977, p. 70). Much of adolescents' media use now takes place on personal devices, and research on parental mediation shows that parents shape children's internet use through active mediation (talking about content), restrictive mediation (rules and limits), and monitoring, with different effects on online risks (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). In the case of influencers, this role is demanding, because the persuasive intent of influencer content embedded in entertainment is hard for children to recognise, which places a responsibility on parents and educators to explain it (De Veirman et al., 2019).

In this framework, the role of parents is therefore less to limit screen time than to be present as *pamong* who practise active mediation, the form closest to *niteni* done together, by watching with their children, asking questions, and talking about the figures they follow (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). The guidelines of the Seven Habits Movement already involve families in habituation (Kemendikdasmen, 2025a), and they could be enriched with brief guidance for parents on accompanying children in responding to the figures they idolise on social media. Indonesian evidence that influencers shape adolescents' dating standards (Yusuf, 2021) shows why such accompaniment matters. In this way, the Three Centres of Education would not remain a historical concept but would become a framework of cooperation between home, school, and digital space.

Implications for practice and policy

For teachers, these findings call for a shift from the perfect exemplar to the attainable exemplar. The experimental evidence that relevant and attainable exemplars encourage

prosocial behaviour more than extraordinary ones (H. Han et al., 2017) comes from settings outside Indonesia and needs to be tested with Indonesian students. Teachers do not need to rival the appeal of influencers, but they can make their own process visible. Practical forms include thinking aloud while working through a moral dilemma in class, acknowledging a mistake openly and showing how it is corrected, and sharing how they themselves decide whom to follow online. Such practices can be assessed through short student reflections or observation checklists that record whether students can name the reasons behind the teacher's choices. Modelling should also be accompanied by explanations of why the modelled traits are valuable and how students can acquire them (Sanderse, 2013).

Tri-N can also be operationalised as a pedagogy of digital role-model literacy along the lines of Table 6. At the *niteni* stage, students learn to recognise sponsored content and image curation (Abidin, 2017; De Veirman et al., 2019). At the *nirokke* stage, they choose consciously what is worth imitating and justify the choice. At the *nambahi* stage, they rework what they have imitated into a product or stance of their own (Andayani et al., 2021), which can be assessed with a rubric that distinguishes copying, adapting, and creating. In this way, teachers perform the *ing madya* and *tut wuri* roles that influencers seldom perform.

At the policy level, the Seven Habits Movement and the eight dimensions of the graduate profile, including the dimension of independence, provide a starting point because they already name the habits and dispositions to be formed (Kemendikdasmen, 2025a, 2025b). They are not sufficient, however, for the reason noted in the Introduction, namely that they say little about who models these habits. Three specific steps would close this gap. The first is to add indicators of teacher role modelling, such as visible reasoning and consistency between words and conduct, to the implementation guidelines. The second is to include digital role-model literacy in teacher professional development, including for PAI teachers. The third is to provide parents with short guidance on the active mediation of the influencers their children follow.

Limitations and research agenda

This study has several limitations. First, as a conceptual article, its propositions have not been tested empirically. Second, the hermeneutic strand relies on one volume of Dewantara's collected writings, so his writings on culture and on the principles of Taman Siswa were not examined directly, and the interpretation of *tuladha* may be incomplete. In particular, the *trikon* principle and the formula *ngerti, ngrasa, nglakoni* are taken from secondary sources. Third, the evidence on influencers comes almost entirely from outside Indonesia, and no data on the role models of Indonesian students were collected. Fourth, although the search was documented, it was purposive and iterative rather than systematic and was limited to sources in Indonesian and English. Fifth, the status judgements in Table 5 involve interpretation and were made by the authors themselves rather than by independent raters. Sixth, the authors write as researchers and educators in Islamic education at an Indonesian university, a position that may incline them to read Dewantara and *uswah hasanah* sympathetically. Finally, the influencer category is treated in general terms, even though the ecosystem ranges from entertainment creators to educational and religious ones.

Future research can test the propositions along three lines. The first is surveys of Indonesian secondary students that compare the strength of their parasocial relationships with

their perceptions of teacher role modelling, using adapted parasocial relationship measures (Bond, 2016; Hoffner & Bond, 2022). A sample of several hundred students across regions would allow P1 to be tested with structural equation models. The second is design-based or quasi-experimental classroom studies that apply the cycle of present *tuladha* and Tri-N as a pedagogy of digital role-model literacy, preceded by expert validation of the model, in order to test P2. The third combines content analysis of Indonesian educational and religious creators, to see whether some of them perform the *ing madya* function (Beta, 2019; Brestovanský & Sekerešová, 2022), with studies of parental mediation in Indonesian families in order to test P3.

Conclusion

This article asked whom students imitate today and found that the question cannot be settled by comparing the values carried by teachers and influencers. Read through the Among System, *Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha* is one position in a nurturing relationship, paired with *Ing Madya Mangun Karsa* and *Tut Wuri Handayani* and directed toward the student's independence. Of the five elements of *tuladha* derived from Dewantara's text, influencer role modelling fulfils closeness only illusorily, partially fulfils reciprocity and independence, does not fulfil responsibility, and cannot be assessed on harmony. We call this pattern truncated *tuladha*, and the article suggests that it may also characterise religious influencers. Theoretically, the concept of truncated *tuladha* and the five-element framework offer a perspective from an Indonesian pedagogical tradition on the international debate about moral modelling, namely that the value of an exemplar depends on whether it is accompanied by dialogue and by the gradual withdrawal of the model.

Practically, teachers, including PAI teachers, are encouraged to become attainable exemplars and to use Tri-N as a pedagogy of digital role-model literacy, parents to practise active mediation, and policymakers to add indicators of role modelling to habituation guidelines. These conclusions are limited by the conceptual design, the reliance on one volume of Dewantara's writings, the predominance of non-Indonesian evidence on influencers, and the interpretive nature of the status judgements. The most pressing next step is to test the first proposition empirically with Indonesian secondary students, followed by expert validation and classroom trials of the cycle of present *tuladha*.

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