



Faith, Reason, and Character: A Systematic Review of Christian Educational Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study analyzes the development of educational philosophy, focusing on the role of Christian philosophy of education in shaping a holistic, character-based educational paradigm compared to general educational philosophy.

Methodology: The study uses a systematic literature review (SLR) method following the PRISMA 2020 protocol. Data were collected from Scopus, ERIC, Crossref, and Google Scholar, with publications from 2015 to 2025. The screening process yielded 22 eligible articles, which were analyzed using content analysis.

Main Findings: General educational philosophy emphasizes rationality, empirical evidence, and humanism, fostering critical, adaptive learners. Christian philosophy integrates faith and reason, moral formation, and the teacher's role as a spiritual and moral exemplar. Both share a holistic approach but differ in epistemological and axiological foundations, offering a balanced educational paradigm.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study provides a unique contribution by integrating Christian philosophy of education with general educational philosophy, promoting a balanced paradigm that nurtures both intellectual competence and spiritual, moral, and ethical development. It advances contemporary educational discourse by addressing the interplay between rationality and spirituality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Science and formal education are two inseparable aspects of the long journey of human civilization. Since Ancient Greek, philosophy has served as the primary foundation for humanity's pursuit of understanding reality through rationality, logic, and empirical observation. The ideas of key figures such as Socrates, with his dialectical method; Plato, through his concept of ideal education in *The Republic*; and Aristotle, with his systematization of logic and empirical science, laid the groundwork for the Western intellectual tradition and positioned education as a means for cultivating the whole person [1]. The person that they are aiming to is a citizen with knowledge and skill for themselves in the democratic process [2].

However, the development of knowledge did not cease with ancient Greece. Entering the Middle Ages, Christianity assumed a dominant role in shaping the dynamics of science and education. The Church functioned as the central institution of learning through monasteries and cathedral schools, which preserved classical manuscripts and transmitted them to subsequent generations. The Enlightenment at that moment, represented an intellectual movement that introduced a new educational paradigm. Emerging from the traditions of Renaissance humanism as well as rationalist and empiricist thought, it departed from scholastic principles and redefined the

role of education during an era dominated by the authority of the Church and the State [3]. The scholastic tradition developed by Augustine and Boethius, as noted by Leinsle, reflects an interaction between authority and reason within theological discourse affirming the importance of maintaining a balance between revelation and rationality [4]. From this tradition emerged the first European universities, such as Bologna, Paris, and Oxford, which became the precursors of modern formal education [5].

In the Modern era, a profound transformation in knowledge emerged through the Renaissance, Reformation, and Scientific Revolution. The Reformation, led by Martin Luther, emphasized the importance of biblical literacy for all believers, which in turn led to the development of public education and the mass schooling system. Meanwhile, Christian scientists such as Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton viewed scientific inquiry not as an antithesis to faith, but as a means of exploring the orderliness of God's creation [1]. In the modern era, education evolved from a local and moral enterprise into a global institution closely linked to economic productivity, technological advancement, and the formation of human capital as the foundation of national development [6]. Thus, modern science developed not in opposition to religion, but rather within a religious framework that affirmed the rationality and harmony of creation. This historical reality, however, created a gap in academic discourse, as the role of Christianity has often been underrepresented or insufficiently acknowledged. The modern educational system adopted in Indonesia today—including the concept of the university, structured curriculum, and mass education is, in fact, an inheritance from the Western educational tradition deeply influenced by Christian philosophical thought [5].

Christian education is a multifaceted field that integrates theological principles with educational practice to promote the holistic development of individuals. It is firmly rooted in the belief that Christian teachings influence every aspect of life and thought, thereby necessitating a distinctive philosophy of education [7]. This philosophy underscores the importance of cultural responsiveness and intercultural perspectives, particularly in diverse societies such as the United States [8]. The relationship between practical theology and religious education is crucial, as it influences both the instructional process and the methodologies employed across various educational settings [9]. Christian education aims to integrate intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions, providing a comprehensive approach to learning that encompasses moral and ethical development [10]. This holistic orientation is particularly evident in independent Christian schools, where religious instruction and values education encourage students to engage with sacred texts and apply ethical principles in everyday life [11]. In Knight's framework, Christian education is grounded in God's special revelation the Scriptures and integrates key theological doctrines such as revelation, the Trinity, Christology, pneumatology, anthropology, soteriology, and ecclesiology to form a coherent biblical foundation for all educational theory and practice ([12]. Furthermore, Christian education is viewed as a form of ministry representing the highest calling aimed at developing mental, physical, social, and spiritual capacities in a balanced manner [13]. In responding to contemporary challenges, Christian education also integrates modern information systems and digital technologies to support students' spiritual growth and learning. Its interdisciplinary nature continues to enrich the field, fostering innovation and constructive dialogue concerning its epistemological, ethical, pedagogical, and curricular dimensions [14]. Entering the twenty-first century, Christian education is diversifying into specialized ministries while simultaneously adapting to technological advances and responding to the growing tension between secularization and the church's mission to nurture faith and moral formation in a changing society [15].

Although numerous studies have examined Christian education conceptually, recent literature [16], [17] indicates that systematic comparative analyses between Christian philosophy of education and general educational philosophy remain limited, especially in relation to holistic education in the Indonesian context. Therefore, this study is operationally limited to Indonesian- and English-language articles published between 2020 and 2025 to provide a clear and measurable analytical scope. The novelty of this study lies in offering a comparative philosophical synthesis that positions Christian educational philosophy as an epistemological and axiological alternative within modern educational discourse, which has predominantly been shaped by secular perspectives. Therefore, this systematic literature review aims to trace the historical development of educational philosophy and analyze the role of Christian educational philosophy in comparison with general educational philosophy. By reviewing recent scholarly works, this article highlights how Christian educational philosophy offers a distinctive contribution to the development of holistic, character-based, and contextually relevant education in the modern era.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework. As highlighted by [18], PRISMA serves as a widely accepted, structured guideline that enhances transparency, critical appraisal, and reproducibility in systematic reviews, including those in social science and management-related fields. This approach was chosen to systematically trace and compare the contributions of general educational philosophy and Christian educational philosophy in shaping holistic and character-oriented education. The literature search

was conducted across four major academic databases Scopus, ERIC, Crossref, and Google Scholar covering publications from 2020 to 2025.

Table 1. Eligibility criteria and search strategy (PCC)

| Population | Concept | Study Design & Publication | Search Sources | Key Search Term |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Educational philosophy, Christian educational philosophy | The main concepts examined in this review focus on the development of educational philosophy within Christianity, encompassing four major dimensions: historical aspects, philosophy of science, contributions to formal education, and contemporary relevance | Both primary and secondary studies were included, provided they adopted historical, philosophical, or theological approaches relevant to the topic (5 years: 2020-2025) | Scopus, Eric, Google Scholar, dan Crossref | ("Christian education" OR "Christian philosophy of education" OR "theology of education") AND (philosophy OR epistemology OR axiology OR ontology OR worldview) AND (history OR development OR evolution OR tradition OR "formal education") AND (school OR university OR curriculum OR pedagogy OR "religious education") |

The initial search yielded 1,090 articles, from which 850 remained after duplicates were removed. Following abstract screening and assessment of content relevance, the number was reduced to 757. Further filtering based on the publication range (2020–2025) yielded 378 articles, and after a full-text eligibility assessment, 277 were deemed to meet the substantive criteria. Of these, 22 final articles were selected for in-depth qualitative synthesis, as illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

The analytical process employed content analysis to identify key themes, including epistemology, axiology, the role of the teacher, and holistic approaches to education. Each article was examined in relation to its philosophical framework, relevance to character education, and contribution to the development of both Christian and general educational paradigms. The PRISMA procedure ensured that the selection process was conducted in a systematic, transparent, and replicable manner, allowing for reproducibility in future studies of a similar nature.

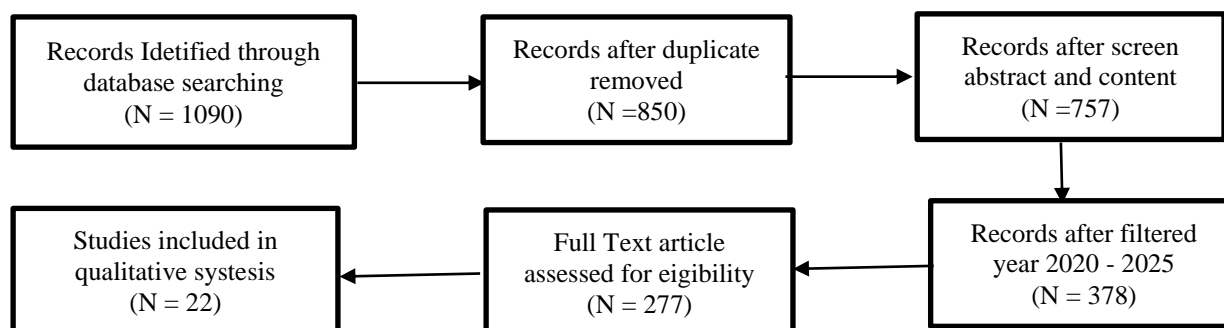


Figure 1. PRIMSA flow chart of search results and study selection

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 presents a synthesis of the 22 reviewed articles, encompassing the type of educational philosophy, main areas of focus, key findings, and their relevance to holistic and character-based education. The literature analysis indicates that both general and Christian educational philosophies contribute significantly to the formation of an educational paradigm that positions the human being as a rational, ethical, and spiritual subject.

Table 2. Summary of include studies

| Author | Type of Educational Philosophy | Main Focus | Key Findings | Relevance to Holistic & Character Education |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|
| Anisa et al., 2024 | Pancasila-based | Character development in | Integrating Pancasila values enhances morality, | Shapes intelligent, moral, and integrity-driven learners |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| [19] | Educational Philosophy | elementary students through the integration of Pancasila values | empathy, and social awareness; teachers play a strategic role | |
| Ruru & Bilo, 2023 [17] | Christian Religious Educational Philosoph | Philosophical foundation of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in shaping students' faith | CRE emphasizes faith integration in education; the Bible, Jesus Christ, and Christian moral values serve as foundations; teachers guide students' faith reflection | Fosters faithful, moral, and holistic students who integrate faith in intellectual, spiritual, and social life |
| Lumban Gaol et al., 2024 [20] | Christian Philosophy of Education (Biblical and Axiological) | The teacher's role as mentor in shaping students' character based on Biblical truth | Christian teachers guide moral-spiritual formation; teacher modeling and the Holy Spirit play key roles; character building seen as restoring the image of God | Emphasizes holistic character formation (spiritual, moral, intellectual, social) through Christ-like mentorship |
| Pahmi et al., 2024 [21] | Philosophy of Education (Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology) | Enhancing elementary teachers' professionalism through philosophical understanding | Educational philosophy helps teachers define educational goals, design philosophically grounded lessons, and foster innovation; challenges include limited resources and understanding | Encourages teachers to educate holistically—intellectually, morally, socially, and spiritually |
| Mau et al., 2024 [22] | Christian Religious Educational Philosophy (CRE) | The importance of studying CRE philosophy in theological institutions | CRE philosophy bridges theology, philosophy, and educational practice; integrates faith and reason; cultivates critical theological thinking | Develops theological educators with holistic formation spiritual, moral, intellectual and strong faith reason integration |
| Samudra Rhicky et al., 2025 [23] | Christian Philosophy of Education (Biblical Values) | The role of Christian philosophy in shaping students' holistic character amid globalization and moral crisis | Values of love, truth, responsibility, and service form the basis for moral education; faith integration in curriculum and pedagogy drives transformation | Builds students of integrity, faith, and ethics who impact society positively |
| Saputra Koeswito et al., 2025 [24] | Pancasila Philosophy of Education (influenced by idealism, pragmatism, humanism, etc.) | The role of Pancasila as a philosophical foundation for national education policy | Pancasila philosophy provides holistic direction (intellectual, moral, spiritual, social); addresses moral decline and inequality through revitalizing values | Shapes intelligent, ethical, and globally competitive citizens without losing national identity |
| Yusuf et al., 2025 [25] | Humanistic, Existential, and Pragmatic Educational Philosophy | Integrating educational philosophy and humanistic learning theories in the digital era | Educational philosophy preserves human values amid digitalization; emphasizes meaningful, personal, and holistic learning | Promotes humane, meaningful, and character-based education in the digital age |
| Ekaputri et al., 2024 [26] | Pragmatic-Humanistic Educational Philosophy | Role of educational philosophy in character formation under the Merdeka | Educational philosophy frames moral goals and methods; the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes "Pancasila Student Profile" | Supports creative, responsible, and adaptable learners grounded in moral values |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| | | Curriculum | | |
| Majid et al., 2025 [27] | Educational Philosophy (Humanism, Pancasila, Deontological Ethics) | Forming students' character amid globalization and technological change | Philosophy nurtures moral internalization (justice, tolerance), critical and reflective thinking; uses discussions and case studies | Develops empathetic, critical, and morally upright students ready for global challenges |
| Fahira et al., 2023 [28] | Philosophy of Education (Moral and Humanistic Values) | Role of philosophy in shaping students' morality amid moral crisis | Emphasizes moral direction through family, school, and environment; addresses moral degradation via sustained character education | Forms intelligent and morally responsible students with strong ethical awareness |
| Dartini et al., 2025 [29] | Educational Philosophy (Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, Existentialism, Humanism) | Role of philosophy in building quality and competitive human resources | Promotes lifelong learning, tolerance, and critical–innovative thinking; challenges include access and technological adaptation | Cultivates ethical, creative, and adaptable human resources |
| Wahidji et al., 2025 [30] | Educational Philosophy (Character, Ethics, Progressivism) | Character formation of Generation Z in the digital era | Integrates moral, social, and cultural values; stresses collaboration among teachers, parents, and community | Builds a moral, critical, and culturally rooted Generation Z for global citizenship |
| Kristiyan & Dully, 2025 [31] | Christian Philosophy of Education (Multicultural, Love-based) | Christian philosophy in promoting love, justice, and harmony in multicultural contexts | Based on <i>Imago Dei</i> and Christ's love; fosters interfaith dialogue and peace education; emphasizes inclusivity | Fosters empathetic, faithful students who respect diversity and act as agents of peace |
| Said, 2022 [32] | Christian Philosophy of Education (Biblical–Theological) | Relevance of Christian philosophy as a guide for teachers and learners | Grounds education on Scripture and faith obedience; teachers as moral exemplars guided by the Holy Spirit | Integrates faith and knowledge to form holistic Christian character for societal impact |
| Sianipar & Irawati, 2022 [16] | Christian Axiological Philosophy | The teacher's role as a moral exemplar in character formation | Teachers led by the Holy Spirit model discipline, love, and integrity; character formation mirrors Christ | Shapes honest, disciplined, and responsible Christian students through teacher exemplarity |
| Supit, 2022 [33] | Christian Educational Philosophy (CRE & Foundational Thought) | Relevance of philosophy and CRE for early childhood faith formation | Collaboration between philosophy and CRE builds moral–spiritual foundations from early age | Supports holistic growth (faith, morality, cognition, and social skills) in early childhood |
| Rendi et al., 2024 [34] | Christian Educational Philosophy (Ethics and Biblical Values) | Role of CRE in shaping adolescent ethics in globalization | CRE forms moral identity through values of love, honesty, and responsibility; blended learning supports digital adaptation | Builds resilient, ethical, and spiritually mature Christian adolescents |
| Purwanto, 2024 [35] | Christian Educational Philosophy | Role of Christian schools in Indonesia's | Christian institutions promote justice, love, and human rights despite | Forms faithful, inclusive students who uphold peace and unity |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| | (Holistic, Love & Service-based) | national education system | external challenges | | |
| Boadu & Bonyah, 2024 [36] | Philosophy of Mathematics Education (Epistemological, Ontological, Constructivist) | Integrating philosophy in mathematics teacher education | Philosophical integration enhances inquiry-based learning and conceptual understanding | Develops reflective teachers and students with critical and ethical thinking | |
| Stewart & Roberts, 2015 [37] | Educational Philosophy (Neoliberal Critique, Intercultural, Māori Thought) | Role of philosophy in academic life within neoliberal higher education in New Zealand | Exposes bureaucratic and competitive tendencies; emphasizes intellectual solidarity and intercultural ethics | Promotes dialogical, ethical, and human-centered education | |
| Bagchi, 2025 [38] | Philosophy of Mathematics Education | Revitalizing mathematics education through Pythagorean philosophy | Critiques utilitarianism in math education; calls for harmony, logic, and justice in learning | Shapes intellectually balanced, creative, and socially just learners | |

The analysis of 22 selected articles reveals that both general and Christian educational philosophies serve as essential conceptual foundations for the development of holistic and character-based education. Within general educational philosophy, the discourse is primarily dominated by rational–empirical paradigms, emphasizing the interrelation between knowledge, experience, and moral, as well as productive, human development. Various schools of thought—such as idealism, pragmatism, humanism, and progressivism—have shaped educational value frameworks that highlight freedom of thought, social responsibility, and moral autonomy [19], [25], [27]. In the Indonesian context, Pancasila philosophy represents a synthesis between Western idealism and Eastern spirituality, affirming the role of education as a medium for nurturing faith, intelligence, and national character [24]. Furthermore, humanistic and existential approaches [25] illustrate ongoing efforts to re-humanize education amid the challenges of digitalization and dehumanization in modern learning.

In contrast, Christian educational philosophy exhibits a transcendental and theocentric orientation, placing God as the ultimate source of truth, knowledge, and morality. Studies by [17], [20], [22] emphasize that the epistemology of Christian education is grounded in the relationship between faith and reason, where divine revelation serves as the foundation of human rationality. Christian education thus focuses not only on intellectual achievement but also on the formation of spirituality, character, and morality that reflect the *imago Dei*—the human being as the image of God. Values such as love, honesty, discipline, and responsibility are not merely moral objectives but are understood as expressions of faith actualized through education. Consequently, the role of the Christian teacher extends beyond that of an instructor to that of a co-creator and exemplar of faith, guiding students in moral reflection and spiritual formation [16], [33].

From an ontological and axiological perspective, both philosophical traditions converge in their pursuit of holistic education; yet, they differ in their foundational orientation and value systems. General educational philosophy views the human being as a rational and social creature who constructs knowledge through experience and interaction—an anthropocentric orientation in which humanity becomes the measure and center of values. In contrast, Christian educational philosophy adopts a theocentric orientation, viewing humans not merely as thinking subjects but as creations with moral and spiritual responsibilities toward the Creator.

The review also highlights that teachers and curricula are two pivotal elements in bridging the gap between philosophical idealism and educational practice. In general educational philosophy, teachers act as facilitators who foster critical, reflective, and collaborative thinking, as exemplified in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum [26], [27]. Meanwhile, within Christian educational philosophy, teachers are regarded as spiritual and moral agents who embody a vocational calling of service [20], [16]. The curriculum in general education tends to emphasize competence and national character development, whereas in Christian education, it is oriented toward the formation of Christ-like character and the cultivation of individuals who bring blessings to their communities [32], [31]. In summary, both general and Christian educational frameworks affirm that

character-oriented education can only be realized when philosophical values are genuinely internalized within curriculum design, learning strategies, and teacher exemplarity.

These findings reinforce Leinsle's view, as cited in [4], [1] that the Christian philosophical tradition has made a profound contribution to the development of rationality and modern education. While general educational philosophy seeks to cultivate freedom of thought and critical consciousness, as proposed by Dewey, it risks falling into moral relativism or technological utilitarianism when detached from a transcendent ethical foundation. In contrast, Christian education reminds us that knowledge must ultimately be directed toward the highest good—the harmony between reason and faith, as well as between humanity and God.

In the Indonesian context, integrating these two perspectives is highly relevant. General educational philosophy provides a rational and adaptive framework for national policy development. In contrast, Christian educational philosophy reinforces the ethical, spiritual, and human wholeness dimensions often neglected in modern educational systems.

Thus, the synthesis of these 22 articles underscores that contemporary education must combine the reflective rationality of general philosophy with the moral and spiritual values of Christian philosophy. Education should not merely aim to produce skilled workers, but to form faithful, ethical, and socially engaged individuals. The ideal model of education, therefore, is neither purely secular nor exclusively religious, but one that recognizes the human being as a thinking and believing creature, responsible both to others and to God. However, this study is limited by its reliance solely on sources written in Indonesian and English, which may exclude relevant insights published in other languages. The review also focuses on literature from 2020 to 2025, potentially omitting earlier foundational works. Future research could expand its linguistic and temporal scope or incorporate empirical field studies to validate and deepen these findings.

4. CONCLUSION

This literature review demonstrates that educational philosophy, in both its general and Christian perspectives, provides a fundamental contribution to shaping a holistic and character-oriented educational paradigm. General educational philosophy emphasizes the importance of rationality, freedom of thought, and social responsibility in cultivating individuals who are critical, creative, and adaptable to the demands of a changing world. Approaches such as idealism, pragmatism, and humanism view education as a means for developing human potential and advancing civilization. In contrast, Christian educational philosophy adds a transcendental dimension, stressing the integration of faith and reason, love and truth, and the teacher's role as a spiritual exemplar. Christian education is not merely an intellectual process but a theological act oriented toward the restoration of the image of God (*imago Dei*) within the human person—producing individuals who are faithful, moral, and socially responsible.

Based on the synthesis of 22 reviewed articles, the integration of values from both general and Christian educational philosophies is essential in addressing the challenges of modern education. General philosophy offers a rational and adaptive framework for navigating global change, while Christian philosophy provides an ethical and spiritual foundation that enriches educational direction. The synergy between the two enables the emergence of an educational model that balances reason and faith, knowledge and morality, freedom and responsibility. Ultimately, education should not only serve to enlighten the nation intellectually but also to transform individuals into whole persons those who are faithful, wise, ethical, and capable of fostering peace and justice within society. As a recommendation, future studies should examine how this integrated philosophical framework can be implemented within various educational contexts, including national schools and faith-based institutions. Additionally, policymakers and teacher education programs are encouraged to apply these insights to strengthen character formation and moral leadership in educational practice.

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