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PHILOSOPHY-BASED LEARNING AS THE FOUNDATION FOR DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT
Philosophy is often considered a discipline reserved for adults, even though thinking and questioning are innate to children. In basic education, the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach offers a strong framework for developing critical thinking, empathy, and moral reasoning from an early age. This study explores the implementation of philosophy in primary education and its relevance to character formation and critical thinking development. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), various national and international studies on P4C were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify key patterns and practical implications. The findings reveal that philosophy-based learning, through dialogic discussion and the Socratic method, enhances students' critical thinking, empathy, communication, and moral reasoning. It also demonstrates that philosophical inquiry encourages reflective habits and ethical awareness essential for holistic education. In conclusion, philosophy education in elementary schools is vital for nurturing intellectual growth and reflective character. For Indonesian educators and policymakers, these findings provide a practical basis for integrating philosophical dialogue into curricula as a strategic step toward more humanistic and contextually relevant education.

INTRODUCTIONS

Elementary school represents the initial stage where children begin to explore the world in a broader context. Being naturally curious, children frequently pose "why" and "how" questions, which form the foundation of philosophical thinking (Wattimena, 2016). The philosophy of education plays a crucial role in guiding the learning process according to the stages of child development (Rofi'ah et al., 2023) and in fostering reflective and rational critical thinking skills necessary for determining what to believe or how to act (Kurniawan & Putri, 2023; Mardanova, 2023). With appropriate guidance, children can develop the ability to think philosophically from an early age (Safriyani & Mustofa, 2024). In this regard, basic education functions not only as a medium for knowledge

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transmission but also as an essential means to cultivate ethical awareness and character formation, preparing students to face contemporary challenges, including those emerging in the digital technology era (Nurfatimah et al., 2023).

Current pedagogical practices often emphasize rote memorization and binary (right/wrong) answers, resulting in the underdevelopment of reasoning, dialogue, and questioning skills (Faradella et al., 2024; Sutrisno et al., 2023). In fact, an effective learning process should transform students' behavior and mindset in a more positive and sustainable direction (Juliya & Herlambang, 2021). Philosophy in learning fosters deep thinking, curiosity, and the ability to formulate critical questions (Ab Wahab et al., 2022; Tarigan et al., 2023). The Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach places dialogue at the core of the learning process, positioning teachers as facilitators who encourage children to discover meaning through reflective questioning (Aksoy & Uğraş, 2024; Wattimena, 2016). P4C has been proven to enhance critical thinking, dialogue, problem-solving, empathy, and moral awareness (Safriyani & Mustofa, 2024; Rahmah et al., 2024; Gorard et al., 2020).

In the Indonesian context, local wisdom values such as the Sundanese philosophy of silih asah, silih asih, silih asuh can serve as an entry point for contextual and meaningful philosophical learning (Suryana, 2021; Nuryani et al., 2019; Herawati, 2025). Teachers, as facilitators, are expected to cultivate a learning environment that encourages students to think independently, seek meaning, and appreciate diverse perspectives in line with the principles of Merdeka Belajar (Lipman, 2020; Safitri et al., 2022). Philosophy education at the elementary level not only provides the foundation for developing critical and reflective thinking but also plays a vital role in shaping students' character and social wisdom (Unwakoly, 2022; Yusella & Degeng, 2023). Its successful implementation requires strong support from the government, educators, and the community, as well as a curriculum capable of integrating philosophical values into learning practices (Poerwati et al., 2024).

Despite the increasing global attention to philosophy-based learning, there remains a limited body of research that systematically synthesizes empirical evidence on the implementation of Philosophy for Children (P4C) at the elementary school level, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia. Existing studies are often fragmented, focusing on isolated aspects of critical thinking or character education without a comprehensive framework connecting philosophy-based pedagogy to contemporary educational reforms. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a recent systematic literature review (SLR) that explores the global application of P4C in elementary schools and its implications for the Indonesian education context. By identifying trends, challenges, and best practices, this article aims to provide a conceptual foundation for integrating philosophical inquiry into the nation's basic education system.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the research method and systematic literature review procedures. Section 3 presents the findings on the implementation of philosophy-based learning in elementary schools. Section 4 discusses the implications for critical thinking and character development within the Indonesian educational framework. Finally, Section 5 concludes with recommendations for future research and educational practice.

METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a qualitative approach to examine previous research related to the implementation of philosophy for children (P4C) in elementary education. Data were gathered through a comprehensive review of literature sourced from various open-access databases and scientific journals, both national and international, published between 2016 and 2025. The literature search utilized keywords such as "Philosophy for Children," "philosophy for children," "philosophy of elementary school education," and "philosophy of primary education." The retrieved articles were subsequently screened based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles or conference papers; (2) studies employing empirical, qualitative, or literature review methods; (3) publications written in English or Indonesian; and (4) studies focusing on philosophy-based learning or philosophical inquiry within the elementary education context. Articles were excluded if they (1) lacked empirical or conceptual relevance, (2) focused on non-elementary educational levels, or (3) were inaccessible in full text.

A total of eligible articles were analyzed thematically. The thematic analysis was conducted manually and assisted by NVivo 12 software to ensure systematic coding and data organization. Initial codes were generated from

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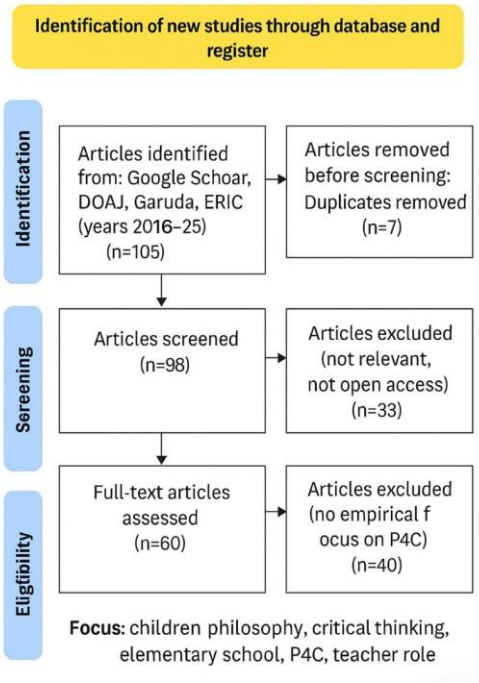
recurring concepts found across the studies. These codes were then clustered into broader themes through iterative comparison and refinement. To ensure reliability, the emerging themes were reviewed and validated through inter-coder agreement, followed by the synthesis of patterns, core concepts, and interrelationships among findings. This process led to a comprehensive conceptual understanding and the formulation of practical implications regarding the integration of philosophy-based learning in elementary education. To enhance the clarity of the research procedure, Figure 1 illustrates the stages of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) conducted using the PRISMA framework.

Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart (Syahrir et al., 2024)



RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The following table summarizes previous studies on philosophy-based learning in elementary education as a foundation for developing students' critical thinking skills. This pedagogical approach emphasizes questioning, dialogue, and reflection, which enable children to construct meaning and evaluate reasoning in a logical and ethical manner.

Table 1. Article Review Results

No	Article Title & Author	Article Summary (Brief Summary)	Results & Findings	Relevance to the Topic
1.	Philosophy education for children? Foundations, application, and critical reflection for the Indonesian context. Wattimena, R. A. (2016).	The philosophical foundation of philosophy education for children in Indonesia, methods of implementation, and critical reflection.	Philosophy education builds children's critical thinking skills from an early age if it is adapted to the local context.	Theoretical basis and Indonesian context for P4C.

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No	Article Title & Author	Article Summary (Brief Summary)	Results & Findings	Relevance to the Topic
2.	Impact of philosophy for children and its challenges. Ab Wahab, D., dkk. (2022).	A systematic review of P4C implementation and the challenges faced.	P4C enhances critical, moral, and social thinking; challenges include teacher readiness and curriculum.	The effectiveness of P4C and barriers to its implementation.
3.	The influence of the P4C curriculum on critical thinking through philosophical inquiry and problem-solving skills. Işıklar, S., & Abalı Öztürk, Y. (2022).	A quantitative study on the effect of P4C on critical thinking and problem solving.	P4C significantly improves critical thinking and problem-solving skills.	Empirical evidence of P4C implementation.
4.	Philosophical Inquiry with 5–7-Year-Olds: 'My New Thinking Friends'. Quickfall, A. (2025).	Exploring philosophical inquiry activities for children aged 5–7 years.	Children are able to engage in simple philosophical discussions, enhancing self-reflection.	Supporting the implementation of P4C for children aged 5–7 years.
5.	Analysis of Philosophy Studies: Integration of the Value of Honesty in the Educational Curriculum. Dewi, D. P., & Ali, M. (2025).	Analysis of the integration of honesty values in philosophy-based curricula.	The philosophy of education helps internalize moral values such as honesty.	Relevant for character development through P4C.
6.	The Use of Questioning Strategies in the Development of Critical Thinking Skills in Children: A Qualitative Study of the Socratic Method. Kanat, K., & Temel, Z. F. (2025).	The use of the Socratic question-and-answer method to develop children's critical thinking.	Open-ended questions and in-depth dialogue enhance critical thinking skills.	Practical strategies in P4C.
7.	Questions as dialogue games: the pragmatic dimensions of "authentic" questions. Macagno, F. (2023).	The use of authentic questions in philosophical discussions.	Authentic questions stimulate more meaningful and reflective dialogue.	Supporting the design of effective P4C activities.
8.	The effect of P4C curriculum on formulating question	P4C for children with special needs in training questioning skills.	Children with learning disabilities improve their questioning skills.	Demonstrating P4C inclusivity.

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No	Article Title & Author	Article Summary (Brief Summary)	Results & Findings	Relevance to the Topic
	skills of children with special learning disabilities. Karadağ, F. (2023).			
9.	On the theoretical foundations of the 'Philosophy for Children' programme. Figueiredo, F. F. (2022).	The theoretical basis of P4C and pedagogical approaches.	P4C builds critical, reflective, and dialogical thinking skills.	Theoretical foundations for P4C research and practice.
10.	Empowering Young Minds: The Impact of P4C and Picture Storybooks on EFL Learners' Anxiety and Reading Comprehension Sutono, A., & Padera, M. P. C. (2025).	Integrating P4C with storybooks for English language learning.	Reduce learning anxiety and improve reading comprehension.	Cross-curricular P4C application.
11.	The impact of P4C on middle school students' empathy, perspective-taking, and autonomy. Asgari, M., Whitehead, J., Schonert-Reichl, K., & Weber, B. (2023).	The effect of P4C on students' empathy, perspective, and autonomy.	P4C enhances empathy, perspective-taking, and autonomy..	The effect of P4C on social-emotional development
12.	The impact of P4C activities on enhancing the speaking skills of gifted students. Balcı, E., & Eryılmaz, R. (2024).	P4C for gifted students improves speaking skills.	P4C activities improve speaking and verbal expression skills.	Developing communicative skills through P4C.
13.	The effect of P4C activities on the development of moral perception and social rules of preschool children. Unal, U., & Gunes, G. (2024).	P4C for preschoolers in moral education.	Children better understand social rules and moral values.	The effectiveness of P4C for early moral education.
14.	The philosophical basis of education and the concept of teaching. Arsyad, H., & Sauri, S. (2024).	The philosophical basis of education and the concept of educating children.	Philosophy-based education improves the quality of learning and character.	The conceptual foundation of P4C.

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No	Article Title & Author	Article Summary (Brief Summary)	Results & Findings	Relevance to the Topic
15.	Teaching healthy lifestyle behaviors based on philosophical thinking to preschool children. Khoramaki, Z., dkk. (2025).	P4C intervention for healthy lifestyle education in preschool children.	The child shows improved understanding and healthy behavior.	P4C can be applied to the development of healthy behavior.
16.	P4C in improving critical thinking in a secondary moral education class. Zulkifli, H., & Hashim, R.(2020).	P4C in moral education classes.	P4C improves critical thinking skills.	The effectiveness of P4C in adolescent moral education.
17.	Can P4C practices be done in primary schools? Zengin, E. (2022).	Qualitative research on elementary school teachers regarding the implementation of P4C.	Teachers see P4C as effective but require training.	Challenges in implementing P4C in elementary schools.
18.	The effects of P4C on children's cognitive development: A three-level. Wei, C., & Chen, L. (2025). - analysis.	Meta-analysis of the effects of P4C on children's cognitive development.	P4C improves cognitive abilities, critical thinking, and creativity.	Strong evidence of the widespread effectiveness of P4C.
19.	The impact of P4C on teachers' professional development. Lam, C. M. (2021).	The impact of P4C on teacher professional development.	Teachers improve their pedagogical competence and professional reflection.	The benefits of P4C for teachers and students.
20.	Fostering epistemic space for collaborative solutions in primary science through a Socratic seminar inquiry approach. Kirk, M., dkk. (2025).	The Socratic seminar method for collaborative problem solving in elementary schools.	Children are able to collaborate and think critically in science.	Application of the P4C/Socratic method for science learning.

To further clarify the focus of this research, twenty selected articles were classified according to their most prominent themes. The results of this thematic grouping are presented in Table 2, titled "Classification of Articles Based on the Theme of Philosophy-Based Learning as the Foundation for Developing Critical Thinking Skills in Elementary Schools." This classification identifies four main themes, namely:

Table 2. Classification of Articles Based on Theme

No	Main Theme	Number of Articles	Percentage %	Main Focus

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1.	Children's Philosophy	6	30%	Study of the philosophical foundations of children's thinking, philosophical approaches, and their relevance in elementary education.
2.	Critical and Reflective Thinking	5	25%	Developing children's critical thinking skills through dialogue, open-ended questioning, and the Socratic method.
3.	Elementary School	3	15%	Implementation of philosophical and reflective activities within elementary school learning contexts.
4.	P4C (Philosophy For Children)	4	20%	The P4C program as a learning model that fosters children's reflective, moral, and social thinking.
5.	The Role of Teachers	2	10%	The role of teachers in managing philosophical discussions, facilitating critical thinking, and integrating philosophical values into learning.
	Total	20	100%	

Children are often described as "little philosophers" because they possess natural curiosity and an intrinsic tendency to question the world around them (Wattimena, 2016; Quickfall, 2025; Figueiredo, 2022). Systematic reviews have demonstrated that Philosophy for Children (P4C) programs enhance critical thinking and moral reasoning, while also improving well-being and social competence (Ab Wahab et al., 2022; Asgari et al., 2023). However, these outcomes vary considerably depending on teacher competence, classroom culture, and socio-educational contexts. Such variations suggest that philosophical inquiry must be adapted to local classroom dynamics to maintain both cognitive and socio-emotional benefits (Balcı & Eryılmaz, 2024; Sutono & Padera, 2025).

Beyond cognitive gains, P4C also influences linguistic and socio-emotional domains. Studies show that philosophical dialogue in language learning fosters students' speaking ability, curiosity, and self-confidence, which in turn promotes engagement and reflective discussion (Balcı & Eryılmaz, 2024; Sutono & Padera, 2025). Yet, findings on its broader effects such as resilience and self-control remain inconsistent, especially in collectivist cultures where conformity is often valued (Unal & Gunes, 2024). This inconsistency implies that P4C's moral outcomes are shaped not only by pedagogy but also by cultural expectations of children's behavior and autonomy.

Philosophy can be metaphorically regarded as the foundation of education, serving as the structural base upon which reasoning and reflection are built (Figueiredo, 2022; Karadag, 2023). Consequently, when philosophy serves as the foundation, the goal of education shifts from mere knowledge transmission to cultivating intellectual habits such as questioning assumptions, recognizing evidence, and engaging in metacognitive reflection (Arsyad & Sauri, 2024). Compared to rote-based moral education, P4C empowers learners to evaluate ideas rationally and appreciate value diversity without falling into relativism (Wattimena, 2016). This approach encourages contextual pluralism an awareness that moral perspectives may differ yet remain open to rational discussion.

Empirical evidence supports these theoretical claims. Khoramaki et al. (2025) found that philosophy-based instruction emphasizing critical and empathetic thinking improved healthy behavior among children and parents, illustrating philosophy's reach beyond the classroom. Similarly, Zulkifli and Hashim (2020) reported that P4C enhances critical thinking and coexistence in multicultural contexts. These findings collectively reveal that philosophy-based education not only develops reasoning skills but also shapes moral dispositions relevant to pluralistic societies. Nonetheless, contextual implementation remains key to ensuring these benefits translate effectively into diverse educational settings.

In philosophy-based classrooms, teachers act not as transmitters of absolute truth but as facilitators of inquiry who guide children toward independent reasoning (Wattimena, 2016). Through open-ended questioning, they encourage children to justify opinions, examine assumptions, and engage in shared reflection (Wei & Chen, 2025;

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Macagno, 2023). Such dialogical interaction strengthens metacognitive awareness and self-regulated thinking, particularly when teachers are well-trained in P4C facilitation techniques (Ab Wahab et al., 2022). Teacher preparation, therefore, emerges as a determinant of P4C's success, influencing both classroom dialogue quality and student engagement (Lam, 2021).

The primary method employed in philosophy-based learning is Socratic dialogue a question-centered approach encouraging students to express opinions and reasons without fear of error (Wattimena, 2016). In various countries, this method has been applied across subjects such as ethics, art, and science, effectively promoting reasoning and collaboration (Kirk et al., 2025). Evidence indicates that Socratic dialogue cultivates critical, creative, and ethical reasoning when supported by inclusive classroom management (Balcı & Eryılmaz, 2024). However, inadequate teacher training and rigid curricula often limit its full potential, especially in education systems emphasizing exam performance over reflection.

Nevertheless, several challenges emerge in the implementation of philosophy-based learning, particularly in Indonesia. Systemic bureaucratization, curriculum overload, and a culture of conformity often restrict opportunities for open inquiry (Wattimena, 2016). A feasible solution is to reframe philosophy as a contextual and joyful practice by integrating it into familiar activities such as storytelling, folklore, or local wisdom traditions (e.g., wayang narratives and pepatah Sunda) that naturally invite moral reflection. Embedding these dialogues in civic or language lessons enables students to explore ethical dilemmas rooted in their cultural experiences.

Teacher readiness remains another pressing challenge. Many teachers lack adequate training to facilitate philosophical dialogue effectively. Short, practice-oriented workshops and micro-modules focused on questioning strategies, dialogic assessment, and reflection techniques could bridge this gap (Ab Wahab et al., 2022). In addition, incorporating peer mentoring among teachers who have successfully implemented P4C can sustain professional growth and promote reflective teaching practices across schools.

Time allocation within the overloaded curriculum also presents a barrier. Integrating brief P4C sessions (20–30 minutes weekly) into subjects such as civics or Indonesian language allows continuity without overburdening schedules (Balcı & Eryılmaz, 2024). Finally, topic selection must be concrete and relatable. Questions like "Is lying always wrong?" or "Can we be happy without money?" can be explored through local stories or contemporary issues, linking abstract reasoning to lived experiences (Unal & Gunes, 2024). Such contextual adaptation makes philosophical inquiry both accessible and meaningful for Indonesian learners.

In summary, Philosophy for Children offers a transformative framework for developing critical and ethical thinking among elementary students. However, its effectiveness depends on culturally responsive pedagogy, sustained teacher training, and integration with local wisdom. When these factors align, philosophy-based learning can empower children to reason, reflect, and act wisely, making it a promising foundation for holistic education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings indicate that Philosophy for Children (P4C) provides a strong pedagogical foundation for cultivating critical, reflective, and ethical thinking among elementary school students. Rather than merely enhancing reasoning skills, this approach fosters intellectual curiosity, cultivates social empathy, and promotes moral awareness attributes that are essential for holistic character formation. Within classroom practice, philosophy functions not only as a framework for reasoning but also as a dialogical process that empowers students to question assumptions, justify opinions, and engage in collective inquiry, thereby rendering the learning process active, meaningful, and humanistic.

Empirical evidence from several countries, such as Germany, demonstrates that sustained implementation of P4C contributes to the improvement of students' critical and moral reasoning. However, in the Indonesian context, the adoption of this approach still faces significant challenges, including insufficient teacher preparation, limited classroom time, and an already dense curriculum. To address these barriers, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education integrate short, practice-oriented P4C modules into in-service teacher training programs, and that local education offices encourage schools to embed philosophical dialogue within existing subjects such as Civic Education

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and Bahasa Indonesia. Such initiatives would allow teachers to apply philosophical inquiry without overburdening instructional schedules.

This study is limited by its reliance on published literature and the lack of primary qualitative data from classroom-based implementations. Therefore, future research should employ action research or case studies in Indonesian schools to evaluate the contextual effectiveness of P4C, particularly in promoting culturally grounded critical and ethical thinking. By advancing these efforts, philosophy-based learning can become a transformative means of nurturing a generation of learners who are not only intellectually competent but also wise, empathetic, and socially responsible.

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