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The Philosophy for Children (P4C) Approach in Enhancing Questioning Skills of Primary School Teachers in Implementing Teaching and Learning in the Classroom

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Abstract

Teacher questioning skills are one of the key elements in teaching and learning as they stimulate critical thinking, assess pupils understanding, and foster meaningful classroom interaction. However, many studies have revealed that teachers questioning practices tend to focus on factual and lower-order questions, thus limiting pupils learning potential. This conceptual paper discusses the potential of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach in enhancing primary school teachers questioning skills through the principle of the community of inquiry. Drawing upon literature review, discussion, and theoretical synthesis, a conceptual framework is proposed, linking input (P4C training, modules, community support), process (interactive dialogue within the community of inquiry), output (enhanced teacher questioning skills), and outcome (students becoming more critical, creative, and collaborative). This paper also outlines the implications for theory, practice, educational policy, and future research. In conclusion, P4C has the potential to be a strategic pedagogical approach to support the transformation of primary education in Malaysia.

Keywords: P4C, Questioning Skills, Pdpc, Primary School Teachers, Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)

Introduction

The ability to pose questions is widely recognized as one of the most critical pedagogical competencies in effective teaching and learning. Questioning serves not merely as an evaluative mechanism to assess students' comprehension, but as a catalyst for promoting critical and creative thinking, stimulating meaningful interaction, and fostering dialogic engagement in the classroom (Chin, 2007; Dillon, 1990). Within contemporary educational discourse, teacher questioning is viewed as a powerful instrument for cultivating metacognitive awareness and nurturing students' capacity for reasoning and reflection key skills required in the twenty-first century learning ecosystem (Hattie, 2012; Mercer & Littleton, 2007).

However, empirical studies have consistently reported that teachers often rely heavily on factual, closed-ended questions that elicit limited responses and fail to stimulate higher-order cognitive engagement (Gorard, See, & Siddiqui, 2015; Rahman, 2021). Such practices hinder the development of critical, creative, and reflective learners and perpetuate a teacher-centered paradigm that constrains dialogic interaction and student autonomy. This issue is particularly pertinent within the context of Malaysian primary education, where teachers continue to focus on recall-based questioning and rote learning despite ongoing educational reforms (Ahmad, 2018; Toh & Leong, 2019). The Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025 explicitly emphasizes the cultivation of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) as a cornerstone of educational transformation, aiming to prepare learners for complex global challenges. Yet, the effective realization of this aspiration remains impeded by teachers' limited questioning competence and lack of exposure to dialogic pedagogies (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013; Yusoff et al., 2022).

In this regard, the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach, conceptualized by Matthew Lipman in the 1970s, offers a compelling pedagogical framework to address this gap. Grounded in the philosophy of pragmatism and dialogic constructivism, P4C promotes learning through a community of inquiry a reflective, collaborative process where teachers and students co-construct knowledge through questioning, reasoning, and dialogue (Lipman, 2003; Haynes & Murris, 2012). This approach positions teachers not as transmitters of knowledge but as facilitators of inquiry who model critical questioning and guide students toward independent thought and judgment (Cam, 2006; Trickey & Topping, 2004).

While international research has shown that P4C enhances both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, evidence focusing specifically on its impact on teachers' questioning skills particularly within the Malaysian context remains scarce (Salleh, 2020; Tan, 2023). Most empirical studies have prioritized student outcomes, overlooking teachers' role as key mediators in fostering dialogic pedagogy. This gap underscores the need for more systematic exploration into how P4C can empower teachers to design, implement, and sustain higher-quality classroom questioning practices aligned with HOTS-based pedagogical goals.

Therefore, this conceptual paper aims to: (i) delineate the issue of inadequate questioning practices among Malaysian primary school teachers, (ii) discuss the theoretical underpinnings of P4C as a dialogic and inquiry-based pedagogy, and (iii) propose a conceptual framework that integrates P4C principles into the enhancement of teachers' questioning competence. Through this lens, the paper seeks to contribute to both the theoretical and practical discourse on improving teacher professional development and promoting transformative learning in Malaysian primary education.

Literature Review

Teachers' Questioning Skills: Issues And Challenges

Questioning skills are often regarded as one of the fundamental pillars of classroom pedagogy. They not only assist teachers in assessing students' understanding but also foster meaningful interaction and stimulate critical thinking (Chin, 2007; Dillon, 1990). In theory, their functions are evident. However, in actual practice, numerous studies have found that teachers' questions remain predominantly factual and closed in nature, often requiring only

a single "correct" answer (Gorard, See, & Siddiqui, 2015). As a result, opportunities for students to think more deeply or reflectively become severely restricted. This suggests that teachers' questioning skills continue to be conventional and insufficiently supportive of exploratory learning.

Within the local context, several studies have also reported that primary school teachers in Malaysia face significant challenges in posing questions that can foster students' higher-order thinking. For instance, Ahmad (2018) found that most teachers were more comfortable asking fact-based questions rather than those that require deeper analysis or evaluation. This tendency may generally stem from a lack of pedagogical training that emphasizes questioning techniques, limited teaching experience, and a classroom culture still heavily oriented towards academic achievement alone (Salleh, 2020). Consequently, students are neither encouraged nor adequately trained to ask questions, engage in argumentation, or think beyond conventional responses.

From a policy perspective, the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025 has outlined an ambitious agenda to embed Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) within the national education system. Nevertheless, the reality in classrooms does not always align with these aspirations. Many teachers still lack mastery in posing open-ended, intellectually challenging questions that are capable of stimulating deeper dialogue (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). This clearly highlights a gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities a gap that has yet to be adequately addressed.

Viewed holistically, the weakness in teachers' questioning skills particularly their overreliance on closed and lower-order cognitive questions remains one of the primary factors hindering the effective implementation of HOTS. Thus, there is a pressing need to explore pedagogical approaches that can systemically transform the way classroom questioning is conducted. In this regard, the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach emerges as a promising alternative. Through the *community of inquiry* structure, P4C repositions teachers not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as facilitators who encourage open-ended questioning, critical reasoning, and deeper reflection among students.

The Philosophy for Children (P4C) Approach

The Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach was first introduced by Matthew Lipman in the early 1970s as a response to the shortcomings of the education system at the time, which placed excessive emphasis on rote memorization and the mechanical transmission of knowledge. In many instances, students were not given opportunities to construct their own thinking critically and reflectively (Lipman, 2003). Through P4C, Lipman sought to revive the role of education as a space for rational, creative, and profound thinking, particularly within a more open and dialogic classroom environment (Fisher, 2013).

At its core, the approach is grounded in the concept of the *community of inquiry* a learning community that emphasizes intellectual collaboration between teachers and students. Within this context, the teacher ceases to be the sole authority of knowledge and instead assumes the role of facilitator, guiding students to formulate questions, construct arguments, evaluate peers' perspectives, and engage in continuous reflection (Haynes & Murris, 2012). Interestingly, classroom discussions in P4C are often initiated with stimuli such

as story texts, images, or real-life issues essentially anything that can spark genuine questions and original ideas from students (Cam, 2006).

P4C explicitly challenges traditional educational approaches that focus narrowly on the mastery of facts. Instead, it advocates for a learning process centered on the development of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), which can be applied to everyday life (Trickey & Topping, 2004). In other words, its ultimate aim is not merely to train students to become "little philosophers," but to cultivate them as individuals who are capable of thinking critically, creatively, and empathetically, while appreciating diverse perspectives (Splitter & Sharp, 1995). This vision reflects a more holistic and humanistic value of education.

Beyond contributing to students' cognitive and affective development, the P4C approach also carries significant implications for teachers' pedagogical practices. Teachers who implement P4C are no longer confined to the role of knowledge transmitters. Rather, they are trained to construct open-ended questions that can stimulate deep classroom discourse (Toh & Leong, 2019). Fundamentally, the teacher's role is transformed from a conveyor of information to a facilitator who cultivates shared meaning through authentic and constructive dialogue.

In Malaysia, although awareness of philosophy-based pedagogy and critical thinking has been growing, the implementation of P4C remains at an embryonic stage. To date, most initiatives have taken the form of pilot projects or small-scale action research studies (Salleh, 2020). Nevertheless, the potential of P4C to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, as well as to support the aspirations of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025, underscores the importance of giving this approach more serious consideration within the primary education system (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

The Relationship between P4C and Teachers' Questioning Skills

The effectiveness of any teaching and learning (T&L) process largely depends on the teacher's ability to pose meaningful and intellectually challenging questions. Well-crafted questions can serve as catalysts for thinking, stimulate discussion, and create opportunities for the exploration of new ideas among students (Dillon, 1990). Within this framework, the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach emerges as a pedagogical model with significant relevance to the development of teachers' questioning skills. This is because P4C emphasizes dialogue, reflection, and higher-order thinking as the foundation of classroom inquiry. One of its key contributions lies in its ability to guide teachers in designing open-ended and thought-provoking questions. In a *community of inquiry*, teachers are encouraged to move away from single-answer questions and, instead, to stimulate students to think critically and consider multiple possible responses (Lipman, 2003; Fisher, 2013). Interestingly, this process not only enhances students' thinking but also strengthens teachers' competence in constructing higher-order questions, particularly those that involve analysis, synthesis, and evaluation in line with the revised Bloom's Taxonomy framework.

Furthermore, P4C brings about significant changes to the teacher's role itself. Rather than functioning as mere transmitters of information, teachers are encouraged to act as facilitators of dialogue. In this role, questioning is no longer confined to eliciting answers but becomes a tool for challenging thought, strengthening arguments, and, in many instances,

prompting students to ask questions in return (Haynes & Murris, 2012). This indirectly trains teachers to be more responsive to students' patterns of interaction, while also developing more strategic and reflective questioning skills. Another strength of the approach lies in its emphasis on *follow-up questioning*. According to Trickey and Topping (2004), teachers who adopt P4C demonstrate improved ability to construct sequences of interrelated questions that help students develop arguments, connect ideas, and evaluate perspectives more deeply. In other words, classroom dialogue extends beyond superficial exchanges and evolves into truly reflective and meaningful discourse.

In addition, P4C does not place the responsibility of questioning solely on teachers. Students are also encouraged to generate their own questions, making the teaching and learning process more interactive, open, and dynamic. This, in turn, requires teachers to be more attentive to the types of questions raised and to create constructive spaces for responses thereby strengthening their questioning skills in a practical and meaningful way (Toh & Leong, 2019). Such processes not only enhance teachers' understanding of their students but also reinforce their role as facilitators within an active and reflective learning community.

In the Malaysian educational context, the relationship between P4C and teachers' questioning skills is highly significant, particularly in supporting the implementation of the HOTS agenda outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025. P4C offers a structured and systematic approach to strengthening classroom questioning practices, thereby enabling primary school teachers to elevate the quality of teaching and learning toward more critical, creative, and reflective thinking (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013; Salleh, 2020). Ultimately, the benefits of P4C are not confined to students alone. It also serves as a powerful intervention for empowering teachers' competencies, especially in questioning skills. This symbiotic relationship illustrates that P4C holds great potential as a strategic pedagogical approach that is highly relevant for broader implementation within the Malaysian primary education system.

Conceptual Discussion

This discussion emphasizes how the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach can serve as a conceptual foundation for strengthening the questioning skills of primary school teachers within the teaching and learning (T&L) context. Based on the synthesis of literature, weaknesses in teachers' questioning practices stem from their tendency to rely heavily on factual questions, the absence of training that emphasizes dialogical pedagogy, and a learning culture that continues to valorize single, definitive answers (Ahmad, 2018; Gorard, See, & Siddiqui, 2015). This situation clearly highlights the need for a more systematic form of intervention to shift questioning practices towards being more open, reflective, and critical. In this regard, P4C offers several elements that directly address these gaps.

First, the principle of the *community of inquiry* provides a pedagogical framework capable of structuring classroom interactions around meaningful dialogue. Within this framework, teachers function as facilitators; questioning is no longer viewed merely as a mechanism for assessing knowledge but as a medium for stimulating critical thinking, strengthening arguments, and encouraging reflection (Lipman, 2003; Haynes & Murris, 2012).

Thus, teachers' ability to construct open-ended and in-depth questions can be cultivated more consistently.

Second, P4C's emphasis on follow-up questioning assists teachers in developing sequences of progressive questions. Such questions enable students to connect ideas, expand arguments, and evaluate perspectives more deeply. This process aligns with the principles of Bloom's Taxonomy, particularly the transition from lower-order to higher-order questioning (Trickey & Topping, 2004). As a result, teachers not only enhance their questioning skills but also contribute to the establishment of a more sustainable culture of reflective learning.

Third, P4C recognizes students as initiators of questions. This opens up space for students to formulate their own inquiries, thereby creating more interactive, two-way classroom engagement. This dynamic directly requires teachers to be more attentive to the questions raised and to respond with additional, creative, and intellectually challenging questions (Toh & Leong, 2019). Ultimately, teachers move beyond the role of knowledge transmitters to become facilitators who drive a dialogic learning community.

Although the effectiveness of P4C has been widely demonstrated in numerous international studies (Fisher, 2013; Cam, 2006), its implementation in the Malaysian context still requires closer examination. Key challenges include the readiness of teachers, time constraints in the T&L process, and the need to adapt modules to the national educational culture and aspirations (Salleh, 2020). Therefore, the adoption of P4C in primary schools must be supported with intensive training, contextually appropriate module development, and clear policy backing from the Ministry of Education Malaysia.

Conceptually, P4C is able to strengthen teachers' questioning competencies through three key mechanisms: (i) the construction of open-ended questions, (ii) the development of progressive and reflective follow-up questions, and (iii) the facilitation of two-way dialogue within a community of inquiry framework. These mechanisms not only enhance the quality of teachers' pedagogy but also support the cultivation of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) as outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025. Hence, P4C may be regarded as a relevant and highly promising conceptual approach for improving the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools. Based on the literature review and the preceding discussion, this article proposes a conceptual framework that links the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach with the enhancement of primary school teachers' questioning skills in the implementation of teaching and learning (T&L). The framework comprises four main components input, process, output, and outcome which are interrelated in fostering dialogic teaching and learning while supporting the cultivation of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS).

Input

Input refers to the fundamental factors required for implementing the P4C approach within the classroom context. Among the identified elements are teacher training in P4C pedagogy, the development of modules tailored to the primary school context, as well as the support of learning communities at both the school level and the policy level (Lipman, 2003; Salleh, 2020). These inputs form the foundation for teachers to understand the principles of the *community of inquiry* and to acquire the skills of posing open-ended, reflective, and thought-provoking questions.

Process

The process refers to the implementation of P4C in the classroom through the *community of inquiry*. In this phase, the teacher assumes the role of facilitator who encourages students to formulate questions, construct arguments, evaluate perspectives, and engage in collaborative reflection (Haynes & Murris, 2012). This process also involves the use of open-ended questions, follow-up questioning techniques, and interactive dialogue that provides students with opportunities to think more deeply (Trickey & Topping, 2004).

Output

Output refers to the immediate effects of implementing P4C on teachers' questioning skills. Teachers who adopt this approach are expected to demonstrate improvement in posing high-quality questions—namely open-ended, higher-order, and reflective questions that stimulate meaningful dialogue (Toh & Leong, 2019). This improvement not only strengthens teachers' pedagogical practices but also transforms classroom dynamics toward a more interactive environment.

Outcome

Outcome refers to the long-term effects of improved teachers' questioning skills on students' development. Through the practice of P4C, students are provided with opportunities to develop critical, creative, and collaborative thinking, thereby supporting the formation of 21st-century student profiles as outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). This outcome is not only aligned with the requirements of educational policy but also contributes to the development of well-balanced human capital in terms of intellectual, social, and moral dimensions.

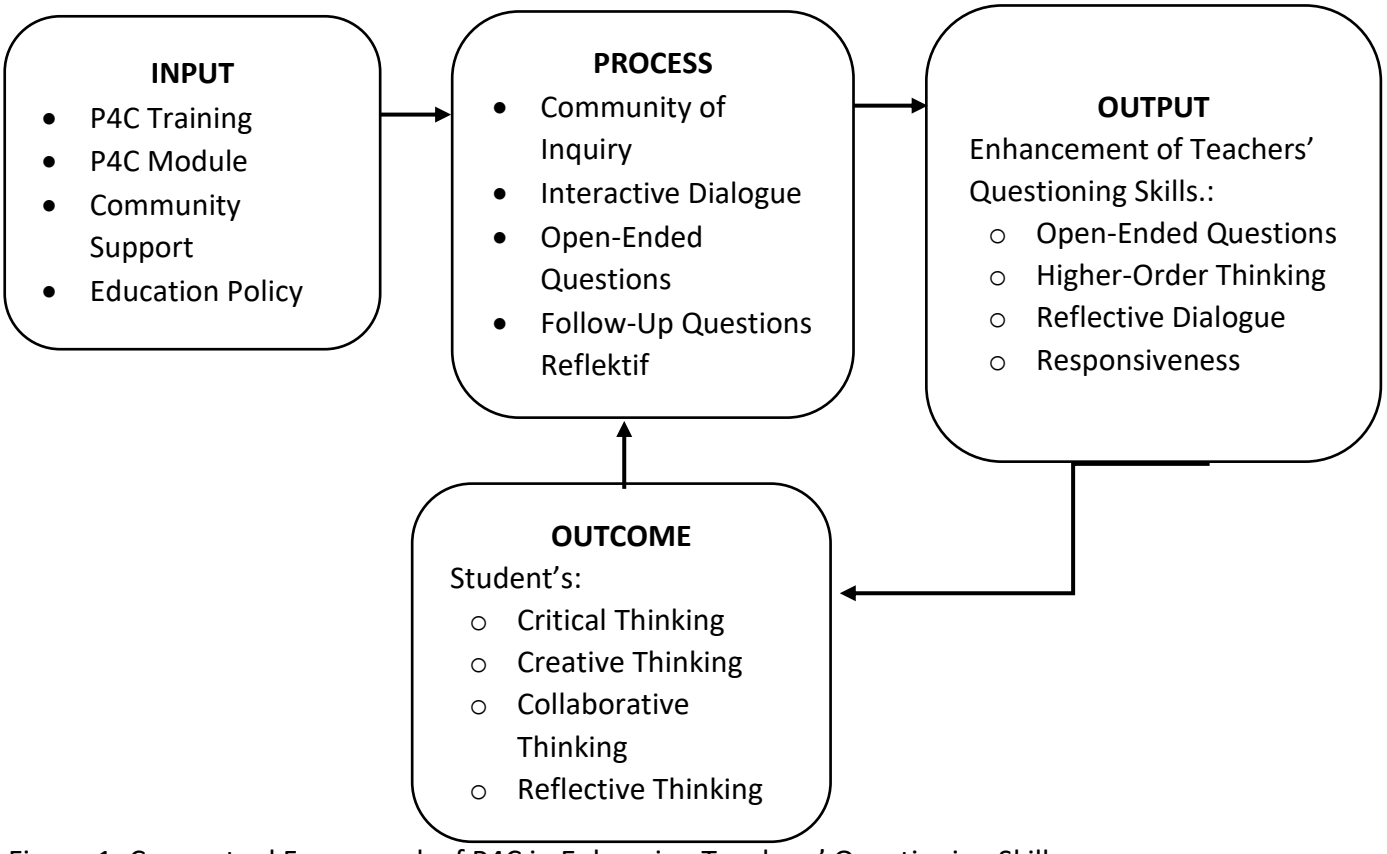

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of P4C in Enhancing Teachers' Questioning Skills.

Implications and Contributions

The proposed conceptual framework linking the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach with the enhancement of teachers' questioning skills carries broad and significant implications across multiple dimensions of education. It not only enriches the theoretical aspects of pedagogy but also provides practical impact for teachers, supports the implementation of national education policies, and opens wider avenues for future research.

Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this conceptual framework provides a clear added value to the development of literature on dialogic pedagogy and studies on teachers' questioning skills. P4C, grounded in the *community of inquiry*, emphasizes the role of teachers as facilitators. This approach directly challenges the traditional paradigm that positions teachers merely as transmitters of knowledge (Lipman, 2003; Haynes & Murris, 2012). In other words, the framework asserts that questioning should not be regarded merely as a technical skill but rather as a professional competency encompassing cognitive, affective, and pedagogical dimensions.

The framework also enriches theoretical understanding of the relationship between critical, reflective, and creative thinking and teachers' questioning practices. Through the implementation of P4C, teachers are not only training students to think at higher levels but are also simultaneously developing their own capacity to design, structure, and refine questions to achieve greater quality. From this perspective, a new theoretical contribution emerges—where questioning can be understood as a two-way process that both develops students' cognition and strengthens teachers' pedagogical professionalism.

Furthermore, this framework opens opportunities for the development of a more comprehensive conceptual model regarding the relationship between alternative pedagogical approaches and teacher competencies. In this context, P4C functions as a bridge between philosophy-based educational theory and actual classroom practice. Interestingly, this dimension has received relatively limited attention in Malaysian literature, thereby adding to the significance of research grounded in this framework.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this conceptual framework are highly significant in the context of primary school teachers' professional development. First, it provides a foundation for teacher training that is more focused on questioning skills. Teacher training modules can be designed to emphasize techniques for posing open-ended questions, constructing sequences of follow-up questions, and facilitating interactive dialogue. Such training has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning (T&L), as teachers become better prepared to challenge students to think critically and reflectively.

Second, these implications also extend to classroom practice. Teachers who apply the principles of P4C will create a more collaborative and inclusive learning environment, where students are encouraged to ask questions, construct arguments, and evaluate different perspectives. This, in turn, transforms classroom dynamics from being teacher-centered to

student-centered an approach proven to be more effective in improving students' cognitive and affective outcomes (Toh & Leong, 2019).

Third, the framework can be applied across multiple primary school subjects. For example, in Islamic Education, P4C can be used to discuss issues of ethics through open-ended questions; in Science, it can be utilized to stimulate scientific inquiry; while in Malay Language, it can encourage students to critically analyze the meaning of texts. Thus, the practical contribution of this framework is its flexibility and adaptability to diverse curricular needs.

Policy Implications

This conceptual framework also contributes to the policy dimension of education. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025 emphasizes the importance of cultivating Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), yet its implementation in classrooms remains limited (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Through this framework, P4C may be considered as an official pedagogical approach to be integrated into teacher professional development policies.

First, the policy implication lies in the formulation of continuous professional development (CPD) programs grounded in the P4C approach. This could be established as one of the core training modules within Teacher Education Institutes (IPG) and public universities that prepare teachers across various disciplines.

Second, from a curriculum perspective, the Ministry of Education Malaysia could explicitly incorporate dialogical pedagogy elements based on P4C into the national curriculum standards, particularly for subjects that require critical and reflective reasoning.

Third, this framework also contributes to the development of teacher quality indicators within classroom-based assessment (PBD) instruments. By positioning questioning skills as one of the key indicators, teachers would be more motivated to enhance their competencies in line with the principles of P4C.

Implications for Future Research

Finally, this conceptual framework opens wide opportunities for future research. First, empirical studies can be conducted to examine the effectiveness of P4C in enhancing teachers' questioning skills through action research or experimental designs. Such studies would provide empirical evidence to support the proposed framework.

Second, comparative studies between urban and rural primary school teachers may be undertaken to evaluate the influence of contextual differences on the implementation of P4C. Factors such as resources, administrative support, and school culture could be analyzed to better understand the extent to which the effectiveness of this approach varies across educational settings.

Third, future research could also focus on different subject disciplines. For instance, the effectiveness of P4C in Islamic Education could be explored in terms of values education, while in Science it could be examined in relation to the development of scientific thinking. In addition, qualitative studies involving classroom observations and in-depth interviews with

teachers could be conducted to capture teachers' lived experiences in applying P4C. Longitudinal studies may also be employed to evaluate the long-term effects of P4C on the development of teachers' questioning skills and students' learning outcomes.

Conclusion

Overall, the discussion in this article emphasizes that enhancing teachers' questioning skills is a critical element in strengthening the quality of teaching and learning (T&L) in primary schools. The literature review reveals that there are still significant weaknesses in teachers' questioning practices, particularly their tendency to rely on factual and lower-order questions that do not truly stimulate deeper thinking (Ahmad, 2018; Gorard, See, & Siddiqui, 2015). In the Malaysian educational context, this reality is in conflict with the aspirations of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025, which highlights the cultivation of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). These aspirations demand that teachers acquire the pedagogical capacity to pose open-ended, reflective, and dialogical questions.

The Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach, pioneered by Lipman, has been shown to support the development of students' critical, creative, and reflective thinking through the principle of the *community of inquiry* (Lipman, 2003; Fisher, 2013). However, the benefits of P4C extend beyond students. The approach also strengthens teachers' questioning skills through the use of open-ended questions, the application of follow-up questioning techniques, and the consistent practice of interactive dialogue (Toh & Leong, 2019; Trickey & Topping, 2004). In other words, P4C provides teachers with an ongoing form of practical training that enables them to construct questions that are more strategic and in-depth.

This article has further proposed a conceptual framework that links P4C with the development of primary school teachers' questioning skills. The framework illustrates the continuity between inputs (training, modules, and policy support), processes (implementation of the *community of inquiry*), outputs (enhancement of teachers' questioning skills), and outcomes (the development of students who are critical, creative, and collaborative). The implications of this framework extend across four dimensions: theoretical, practical, policy, and future research. Collectively, these dimensions have the potential to contribute meaningfully to both educational policy and classroom practice in Malaysia.

In conclusion, P4C should be considered a significant pedagogical strategy in efforts to enhance teachers' questioning skills. If implemented systematically, this approach has the potential to foster more meaningful teaching and learning, in line with the goal of nurturing 21st-century students who are critical, creative, reflective, and prepared to become active contributors to a knowledge-based society.

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