

Teachers as Facilitators through Philosophy for Children (P4C) Training: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Philosophy for Children (P4C) positions teachers as facilitators of inquiry rather than transmitters of knowledge. This systematic literature review synthesises evidence on how P4C training supports teachers' facilitation competencies and the challenges that shape classroom implementation. Guided by PRISMA 2020, studies were identified from Scopus, Web of Science and Taylor & Francis using predefined search strings and eligibility criteria. Twenty studies published from 2021 to 2026 were included and synthesised thematically. Three themes emerged: teacher transformation, facilitation competencies, and implementation challenges. Across the literature, P4C-related training supported a shift towards dialogic and student-centred teaching, improved questioning and active-listening practices, strengthened teachers' capacity to develop critical, creative and caring thinking, and supported the formation of communities of inquiry. Implementation was constrained by uneven teacher confidence, curricular pressure, limited time and resources, and cultural or institutional expectations that favour teacher-centred instruction. The review indicates that effective P4C professional development should be sustained, practice-oriented and supported through feedback, reflection and collegial learning. These findings provide a basis for designing context-sensitive P4C teacher-development initiatives, including in Malaysian education.

Keywords: Philosophy for Children (P4C), Teacher Facilitation, Teacher Training, Community of Inquiry, Systematic Literature Review

Introduction

Changes in the landscape of twenty-first-century education have transformed the role of teachers from transmitters of knowledge into facilitators who guide students in constructing knowledge through inquiry, dialogue, and reflection. This transformation is aligned with the aspiration to develop students' higher-order thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration skills, as emphasised in twenty-first-century education (OECD, 2019). Within this context, Philosophy for Children (P4C) has received increasing attention as a

pedagogical approach that emphasises dialogue-based learning, reasoning, and the formation of a Community of Inquiry, enabling students to think critically, justify their viewpoints, and respect diverse ideas (Lipman, 2003; Gregory et al., 2017).

The implementation of P4C depends not only on the use of modules or learning activities but is also strongly influenced by teachers' ability to facilitate philosophical dialogue effectively. In this approach, teachers no longer act as the primary source of knowledge; instead, they serve as facilitators who guide students in posing questions, constructing arguments, listening to peers' views, and reflecting on issues (Lam, 2021). Therefore, professional training in P4C is an important component in developing teachers' competencies in questioning, active listening, dialogue management, and facilitating a community of inquiry.

Earlier reviews establish the value of P4C but do not fully resolve the teacher-development question. Ab Wahab et al. (2022) reviewed broad P4C impacts and implementation challenges, including higher-order thinking, democratic discussion, safe learning environments, and difficulties faced by teachers and students; teacher training and facilitator development, however, were not the central analytical focus. Kilby (2025) meta-analysed 30 studies and 62 data sets to quantify learner outcomes, particularly critical thinking. Its focus was the magnitude of student benefits rather than how teachers are prepared, how their professional roles change, or which facilitation competencies underpin effective P4C practice.

Four teacher-focused issues therefore remain insufficiently synthesised: the forms and features of P4C professional learning, including guided practice, coaching, feedback and reflection; teacher transformation in beliefs, professional identity, classroom authority, and the shift towards dialogic facilitation; the development of competencies such as open-ended questioning, active listening, reason-giving, participation management and community-of-inquiry facilitation; and the implementation conditions that enable or constrain sustained practice, including confidence, curriculum pressure, time, resources, school support, and cultural or institutional expectations. Existing evidence often treats these dimensions separately, limiting understanding of how training is translated into competent and sustainable classroom facilitation.

This review addresses that gap through a recent, teacher-centred synthesis connecting P4C training, teacher transformation, facilitation competencies, and implementation conditions. Unlike earlier reviews centred mainly on broad P4C impacts or student outcomes, this SLR synthesises empirical studies from 2021 to 2026 to examine how training supports teachers as facilitators of critical thinking, what competencies are developed, and what conditions enable or constrain sustained classroom implementation. This sharper focus provides an evidence base for practice-oriented and context-sensitive P4C teacher-development initiatives.

Research Objectives

This study systematically synthesises previous studies related to the role of teachers as facilitators through Philosophy for Children (P4C) training. The review has three objectives:

- Identify how Philosophy for Children (P4C) training helps teachers improve

their skills as facilitators of critical thinking.

- Identify the facilitation skills developed among teachers through Philosophy for Children (P4C) training.
- Examine the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach in the classroom.

Research Questions

The review addresses the following research questions:

- How does P4C training help teachers improve their skills as facilitators of critical thinking?
- What facilitation skills are developed among teachers through P4C training?
- What challenges do teachers face when implementing P4C in the classroom?

Methodology

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesise previous studies concerning the role of teachers as facilitators through Philosophy for Children (P4C) training. The SLR approach was selected because it enables empirical evidence to be analysed transparently, systematically, and comprehensively while reducing the risk of bias in literature selection and interpretation (Snyder, 2019; Page et al., 2021).

The review process was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines, which comprise four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of articles. Articles were retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Taylor & Francis. The literature search employed combinations of keywords related to Philosophy for Children, teacher training, teacher professional development, Community of Inquiry, critical thinking, and facilitation using the Boolean operators AND and OR.

Identification and Search Strategy

The identification stage was designed around the core concepts in the research questions: Philosophy for Children (P4C) and Community of Inquiry; teacher training, teacher professional development and teacher education; and facilitation, dialogic practice, inquiry and critical thinking. Synonyms and related terms were combined using Boolean operators, phrase searching and truncation to improve retrieval precision. Searches were conducted in Scopus and Web of Science, with Taylor & Francis Online used as an additional publisher-platform source to broaden coverage of relevant P4C, teacher-development and dialogic-teaching studies.

Table 1

Databases and search strategy

Source	Records	Search string
Web of Science (WoS)	50	("Philosophy for Children" OR P4C OR "Community of Inquiry") AND ("teacher training" OR "teacher professional development" OR "teacher education") AND (facilitat* OR dialogic OR inquiry OR "critical thinking")
Scopus	31	("Philosophy for Children" OR P4C OR "Community of Inquiry") AND ("teacher training" OR "teacher professional development" OR "teacher education") AND (facilitat* OR dialogic OR inquiry OR "critical thinking")
Taylor & Francis Online	222	("Philosophy for Children" OR P4C OR "Community of Inquiry") AND ("teacher training" OR "teacher professional development" OR "teacher education") AND (facilitat* OR dialogic OR inquiry OR "critical thinking")

The searches identified 303 records: 31 from Scopus, 50 from Web of Science, and 222 from Taylor & Francis Online. Fourteen duplicates were removed, leaving 289 records for screening.

Screening and Eligibility

A total of 303 articles identified during the identification stage proceeded to the screening process. Screening is the process in which inclusion and exclusion criteria are established and applied to select articles that are suitable for the intended SLR (Shaffril et al., 2021). The first criterion used in this SLR was year of publication, with publications from the publication period 2021 to 2026 selected. This period was chosen for several reasons. First, it is consistent with the concept of study maturity discussed by Kraus et al. (2020), as a substantial number of relevant articles were identified during this period. In addition, searches of the main databases indicated that a marked increase in publications related to P4C training among teachers began in 2025. To maintain quality, this SLR included only journal articles. To minimise potential confusion in reading and interpretation, only articles published in Malay or English were selected.

Next, only articles containing relevant empirical data were eligible for inclusion in the SLR. This means that review articles were excluded because the primary objective of this SLR is to identify and examine findings from previous empirical studies rather than reviews of previous studies. Another inclusion criterion concerned the focus of the findings: selected articles had to report findings related to teacher training in P4C. Articles that did not indicate a focus on teacher training in P4C were excluded. This criterion was important to ensure that all selected articles contributed findings relevant to the SLR being developed (see Table 2).

After screening, 249 records were excluded and 40 articles proceeded to eligibility assessment. Titles and abstracts were reviewed first; when relevance remained unclear, methodology, results and discussion sections were examined. Twenty articles were then excluded because P4C or philosophical inquiry was not the primary focus, the paper lacked the required empirical evidence, teacher/facilitator outcomes were insufficient, or the population/context was outside the study scope. Twenty studies were included in the final synthesis.

Table 2

Article selection criteria

Criterion	Inclusion requirement
Publication year	2021–2026
Publication type	Journal articles
Language	English or Malay
Type of findings	Empirical studies
Focus	Data related to teacher training/facilitation in Philosophy for Children (P4C)

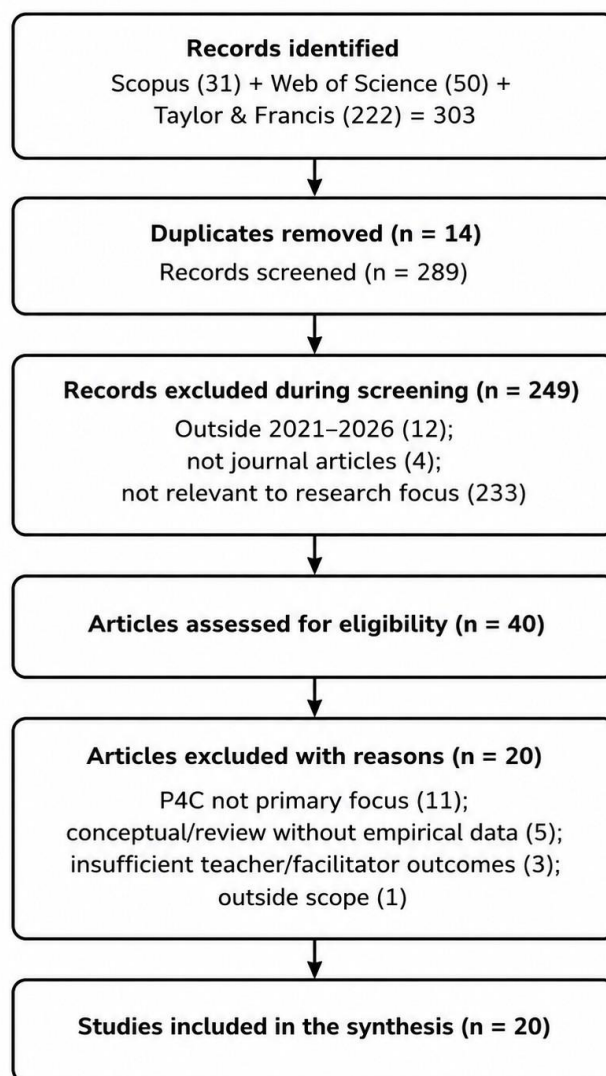


Figure 1. PRISMA flow of the article-selection process

Quality Appraisal

Study quality was appraised before synthesis using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) because the review combined qualitative and mixed-methods research designs (Hong et al., 2018). The appraisal began with two screening questions concerning the clarity of the research aim and whether the collected data could address that aim. Studies were then

assessed against design-specific criteria using Yes, No, or Can't tell. The source review used a threshold of at least three of five design-specific criteria for sufficient quality. Appraisal judgements were discussed to reach agreement; where uncertainty remained, a further opinion was sought. Table 3 presents a concise summary of the appraisal decisions recorded in the review.

Table 3

Summary of quality-appraisal decisions

Study	Design group	Decision
Lam (2021)	Qualitative	Accepted
Lam (2023)	Qualitative	Accepted
Jirásek & Jágerová (2024)	Qualitative	Accepted
Wang & Wang (2026)	Qualitative	Accepted
Clarke et al. (2025)	Qualitative	Conditionally accepted
Zappalà & Smyth (2021)	Qualitative	Accepted
Schaffalitzky (2024)	Qualitative	Accepted
Schou-Juul et al. (2023)	Qualitative	Conditionally accepted
Liu & Yoon (2025)	Qualitative	Accepted
Dessingué & Wagner (2025)	Qualitative	Conditionally accepted
Rodríguez (2021)	Qualitative	Conditionally accepted
Richards et al. (2026)	Qualitative	Conditionally accepted
Zou & Lee (2023)	Qualitative	Conditionally accepted
Lombardi et al. (2022)	Qualitative	Accepted
Leibovitch et al. (2025)	Qualitative	Accepted
Yalçın (2026)	Mixed methods	Conditionally accepted
Şişman et al. (2026)	Mixed methods	Conditionally accepted
Feyman Gök et al. (2023)	Mixed methods	Accepted

Data Extraction and Analysis

The next stage involved data extraction from the articles that had passed the quality appraisal. Because the focus of this SLR is teachers as facilitators through P4C training, data extraction focused primarily on three sections of each article: the abstract, results, and discussion. Other sections containing relevant data were also reviewed. Extracted data were entered into a table to facilitate subsequent analysis. After the relevant data had been extracted, the next step was data analysis. As this SLR takes the form of an integrative review that combines diverse research designs (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods), qualitative synthesis was considered the most appropriate analytical approach (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005).

Various analytical approaches may be used in qualitative synthesis, and according to Flemming et al. (2018), thematic analysis is among the most appropriate qualitative synthesis techniques for analysing findings from diverse research designs. Thematic analysis seeks to identify patterns in previous studies based on similarities or relationships among the extracted findings. Three themes were identified through this process: (1) Teacher Transformation, (2) Facilitation Competencies, and (3) Implementation Challenges. Findings within each theme were then examined further to develop more specific subthemes. The process of coding, comparison, and theme refinement produced a total of nine subthemes.

The Teacher Transformation theme comprises two subthemes: changes in the teacher's role, and professional development and reflection. The Facilitation Competencies theme comprises four subthemes: dialogue and questioning; critical, creative, and caring thinking; community of inquiry; and management of facilitation sessions. The Implementation Challenges theme comprises three subthemes: lack of confidence among teachers; challenges in adapting to cultural and institutional contexts; and time, resource, and technology constraints. All three main themes were identified across the 20 articles, although the frequency with which each subtheme appeared differed, as shown in Table 5.

All themes and subthemes were subsequently reviewed through iterative review to ensure that each theme was clearly related to the research objectives and research questions. Subthemes that overlapped, lacked clarity, or were less relevant were merged or removed before the final thematic structure was established. External validation by experts in systematic literature review and module development indicated that the three main themes and nine subthemes were appropriate, clear, and relevant to the research questions. The final structure of the themes and subthemes is presented in Table 5.

Findings

Background of the Included Studies

Twenty studies were included in the final synthesis. Based on the publication years recorded in the selected-study table, three studies were published in 2021, one in 2022, four in 2023, two in 2024, six in 2025 and four in 2026. The evidence base therefore spans diverse recent educational contexts, with the largest group of included studies published in 2025.

Table 4

Characteristics and key findings of the 20 included studies

Study	Article focus	Method / context	Key finding relevant to the review
1. Chi-Ming Lam (2021)	The Impact of Philosophy for Children on Teachers' Professional Development	Programme evaluation/field study. Teachers received training and support to implement P4C in Integrated Humanities and English. Implementation involved Secondary 3 and Secondary 4 classes; the number of teachers was not stated in the abstract.	P4C improved teachers' ability to facilitate dialogue and inquiry, develop teaching materials, reflect on practice, recognise students' role in knowledge construction, and transfer P4C strategies to regular teaching.
2. Chi-Ming Lam (2023)	A Philosophy for Children Approach to Professional Development of Teachers	Evaluation study of a professional development programme in Hong Kong. Teachers were trained and supported to use P4C in Integrated Humanities and English. The number of participants was not stated in the abstract.	P4C training helped teachers understand dialogic teaching, identify philosophical concepts in lesson content, develop inquiry activities, and improve reflection on teaching practice.

3. Gülsah Yalçın (2026)	Using Philosophy for Children (P4C) in Teacher Education: Developing Critical Thinking and Dialogic Engagement Among Pre-Service Teachers	Mixed methods. Quantitative data were used to assess critical-thinking dispositions, while pre-service teachers' interactions and discussions during P4C sessions were analysed qualitatively. The sample size was not stated in the abstract.	P4C supported the development of critical-thinking dispositions, reasoned dialogue, and pre-service teachers' awareness of epistemic and ethical responsibility when giving reasons and evaluating others' views.
Study	Article focus	Method / context	Key finding relevant to the review
4. Ivo Jirásek & Kateřina Jágerová (2024)	Czech Primary School Teachers' Experience with the Philosophy for Children (P4C) Approach	Qualitative study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The sample comprised four primary school teachers. Data were obtained through unstructured interviews; one teacher was interviewed both online and face-to-face and was observed during two P4C sessions.	P4C enhanced students' thinking, communication, and social skills. Teachers' roles shifted from knowledge transmitters to facilitators, teacher-student relationships became more equal, and teacher confidence increased through training and practical experience.
5. Xi Wang & Ting Wang (2026)	Teachers' Perspectives on Chinese Philosophy and Philosophy for Children: Navigating Practical Tensions in Chinese School Settings	Qualitative interview-based study with teachers in China, using interpretive analysis of interview data. The number of participants was not stated in the abstract.	Teachers tended to separate P4C from Chinese philosophy. P4C was used in non-core sessions to develop higher-order thinking, whereas Chinese philosophy was taught in a teacher-centred manner to meet curricular requirements. Performance pressures and school structures limited dialogue and teacher autonomy.
6. A. J. Clarke, Emma Goto & Rhiannon Love (2025)	Philosophy for/with Children (P4wC) and Primary Education: Through the Lens of a Pre-Service Teacher Reflecting on Their Practice	Qualitative reflective case study involving one final-year pre-service primary teacher, accompanied by reflections from the teacher educator who guided the implementation.	P4wC helped the pre-service teacher develop critical reflection, confidence, and readiness to use the approach in their career. Despite implementation challenges, the participant demonstrated commitment to continuing the approach.
7. Gianni Zappalà & Ciara Smyth (2021)	Student and Teacher Outcomes from Participating in a Philosophy for Children Program: Volunteer Ethics Teachers' Perspectives	Qualitative pilot study involving volunteer teachers in the Primary Ethics programme in Sydney. Data were based on teachers' views and experiences; the number of participants was not stated in the abstract.	Teachers reported improvements in students' critical thinking, reasoning, confidence, and enjoyment. Teachers themselves became more reflective and more actively engaged in critical and ethical reasoning.

8. Caroline Schaffalitzky (2024)	Learning to Facilitate Dialogue: On Challenges and Teachers' Assessments of Their Own Performance	Case study involving 29 teachers in a teacher development programme. Data consisted of teachers' written self-assessments and feedback from trained supervisors.	Teachers experienced difficulty leaving traditional roles, supporting students' reasoning, and managing interaction. Self-assessments were not always accurate, while supervised training helped teachers improve philosophical-dialogue facilitation skills.
9. Frederik Schou-Juul, Søren Sindberg Jensen & Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell (2023)	Facilitators' Perceptions of Children's Experiences in Online Philosophical Dialogues	Qualitative descriptive study involving five facilitators and 58 synchronous online philosophical dialogues. Facilitators' perceptions were compared with participants' and observers' experiences.	Children experienced the dialogues as meaningful, collaborative, and supportive activities. Facilitators tended to underestimate participants' positive experiences, suggesting possible non-participant bias.
10. Britta Jensen (2025)	Critical, Creative, and Caring Thinking: Communities of Practice in Sydney, Australia	Descriptive/conceptual case study of collaboration between the Association for Philosophy in Schools NSW and the Centre for Critical Thinking and Ethics, Newington College. No specific empirical sample of individuals was reported.	The collaboration established a reference school and a P4C community of practice. Teacher training was identified as a key requirement for ensuring high-quality practice and expanding P4C implementation across the Asia-Pacific region.
11. Gonzalo Santiago Rodríguez (2021)	Nomen Omen: A Pedagogic Narrative About a Community of Inquiry in a Teacher-Training Context	Qualitative pedagogical narrative based on workshops conducted from August to October 2018. Each session was audio-recorded and transcribed; the number of participants was not stated.	Discussion about names created space for questioning identity, subject position, and the role of the teacher. The community of inquiry challenged participants' assumptions and encouraged collaborative meaning-making.
12. Zehra Betül Şişman, İhsan Ünlü & Alper Kaşkaya (2026)	Effects of Philosophy for Children on Democratic Citizenship Perception: A Mixed-Methods Experimental Study	Mixed-methods experimental study. The experimental group received a 15-week Lipman 4C intervention, while the control group followed the regular curriculum. Data were collected through perception scales, classroom observations, reflective journals, and focus groups; the sample size was not stated in the abstract.	P4C improved inquiry skills, justification, empathy, cooperation, and respect for differing views. The approach helped transform teacher-centred classrooms into more democratic communities of inquiry.
13. Désirée Eva Moodley & Rajendra Chetty (2025)	Contextualising Critical Thinking Pedagogy in South African Teacher Education	Conceptual article and theoretical analysis; no human sample or empirical data collection was involved.	Critical thinking should be explicitly incorporated into teacher education. P4C is proposed as a collaborative, story-based approach that can be adapted to values of justice, respect, and dignity in

			the South African context.
Study	Article focus	Method / context	Key finding relevant to the review
14. Malcolm Richards et al. (2026)	Critical Conversations as a Model for Teaching Anti-Racism in Initial Teacher Education	Programme implementation report and qualitative reflection. More than 70 staff members were invited; five sessions were conducted over six months, each facilitated by two colleagues. Feedback was informal and not compulsory.	The P4C-informed framework helped participants discuss sensitive and controversial issues, increased racial awareness, and provided a safer space for dialogue. However, the feedback evidence was limited because it was not collected formally.
15. Zhi Ying Liu & Sook Jhee Yoon (2025)	Preschool Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Questioning Strategy During Storytelling to Develop Children's Critical Thinking in Central China	Six-month qualitative case study involving 13 preschool teachers in China teaching children aged five to six. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis.	The revised Bloom's Taxonomy provided a useful reference for constructing questions. Teachers still needed to strengthen their ability to use different types of questions across cognitive levels to stimulate critical thinking.
16. A. Dessingué & D. A. Wagner (2025)	Promoting Dialogical Critical Thinking in Education: Examining Teachers' Practices and Conceptualizations in the Norwegian School Context	Longitudinal qualitative study using two rounds of interviews with five Norwegian primary school teachers teaching students in Grades 5 to 7.	Student engagement emerged as a central element. Two complementary pathways were identified: dialogic activities, and the development of skills and metacognitive awareness to create dialogic epistemic classrooms.
17. Icy Lee & Min Zou (2023)	Learning to Teach Critical Thinking: Testimonies of Three EFL Teachers in China	One-year qualitative case study involving three EFL teachers. Data were based on participants' testimonies and professional experiences throughout the learning and implementation process.	Teachers' professional knowledge developed through experimentation, reflection, reading, interaction, and formal training. Teachers adapted their practices to local realities and used explicit instruction and inquiry-based learning.
18. Loredana Lombardi, Frederick Jan Mednick, Free De Backer & Koen Lombaerts (2022)	Teachers' Perceptions of Critical Thinking in Primary Education	Qualitative study involving 21 teachers from three European Schools in Brussels. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis.	Reasoning maps, group discussions, and active learning supported the development of critical thinking. Although teachers had been exposed to PBL and P4C, they still required peer learning and the sharing of best practices.

19. Yael M. Leibovitch et al. (2025)	Teachers' (Evolving) Beliefs About Critical Thinking Education During Professional Learning: A Multi-Case Study	Qualitative multiple-case study involving 12 teachers in a 12-month Teaching for Thinking programme. The programme included workshops, action research, three guided cycles, coaching, and teacher reflection.	Adaptive beliefs supported implementation, whereas the belief that critical thinking conflicts with content delivery acted as a barrier. Repeated action research and sustained support helped change teachers' beliefs and practices.
20. Nihan Feyman Gök, I. Taş, Belma Tuğrul, Birgül Berna Uysal & Kader Duman (2023)	The Effect of a Philosophical Thinking-Based Early Literacy Program on Home Literacy Environments and Teachers' Opinions on Professional Development	Convergent parallel mixed-methods study conducted over 28 weeks. The quantitative component involved 1,463 parents across 53 provinces using a home literacy checklist. The qualitative component involved 211 preschool teachers across 53 provinces using interview forms; analyses included t-tests, ANOVA, and content analysis.	The programme had positive effects on home literacy and teachers' professional competencies. Teachers reported increased awareness, dialogic reading, lesson preparation, use of open-ended and creative questions, and more active conversations with children.

Thematic Findings

The thematic analysis of the 20 articles selected through the systematic literature review process generated three main themes aligned with the research objectives. The first theme, Teacher Transformation through Philosophy for Children (P4C) Training, explains how P4C training helps improve teachers' ability to facilitate critical thinking. The second theme, Teacher Facilitation Competencies, describes the facilitation skills developed among teachers through P4C training. The third theme, Challenges in Implementing P4C, explains the constraints and difficulties faced by teachers when implementing the approach in the classroom.

Table 5

Themes, subthemes and frequency across included studies

Theme	Subtheme	Number of studies reporting subtheme
Teacher Transformation	Changes in the teacher's role	18
Teacher Transformation	Professional development and reflection	18
Facilitation Competencies	Dialogue and questioning	19
Facilitation Competencies	Critical, creative and caring thinking	18
Facilitation Competencies	Community of inquiry	15
Facilitation Competencies	Management of facilitation sessions	15
Implementation Challenges	Lack of confidence among teachers	11
Implementation Challenges	Adapting to cultural and institutional contexts	13
Implementation Challenges	Time, resource and technology constraints	14

Teacher Transformation through P4C Training

The first research objective is to analyse how P4C training helps teachers improve their skills as facilitators of critical thinking. Based on the articles analysed, P4C training led to changes in teachers' roles, thinking, and professional practices. Teachers no longer functioned solely as transmitters of knowledge but shifted towards the role of facilitators who guide students in posing questions, providing reasons, evaluating viewpoints, and constructing understanding collaboratively.

The first subtheme is the changing role of the teacher. Lam (2023), Jirásek and Jágerová (2024), Schou-Juul et al. (2023), and Jensen (2025) show that P4C training helps teachers shift from teacher-centred instruction to a more dialogic and student-centred approach. In this approach, teachers provide students with greater opportunities to express their views, pose questions, and construct their own arguments. Teachers act as guides who steer the thinking process without dominating the discussion.

The second subtheme is teachers' professional development and reflection. Lam (2021), Yalçın (2026), Jirásek and Jágerová (2024), and Schou-Juul et al. (2023) show that participation in training and communities of inquiry encourages teachers to reassess their teaching practices. Reflection helps teachers identify strengths and weaknesses in managing discussions and improve the facilitation strategies they use. P4C training also provides opportunities for teachers to exchange experiences, share knowledge, and develop teaching practices collaboratively.

A related outcome across several studies is increased teacher confidence. Several studies indicate that training, guidance, and experience in implementing P4C can increase teachers' confidence in facilitating philosophical dialogue. Although some teachers initially feel less confident in managing open-ended questions and diverse student viewpoints, continuous training helps them become better prepared and more flexible in facilitating P4C sessions.

Teacher Facilitation Competencies

The second research objective is to identify the facilitation skills developed among teachers through P4C training. Based on the analysis of the articles, P4C training helps develop several key competencies, particularly dialogue and questioning skills, critical thinking, the formation of a community of inquiry, and the management of facilitation sessions.

The dialogue and questioning subtheme indicates that teachers need to be able to pose open-ended questions, follow-up questions, and questions that encourage students to provide reasons. Lam (2023), Jirásek and Jágerová (2024), Schou-Juul et al. (2023), and Feyman Gök et al. (2023) show that questioning skills help teachers move discussions towards deeper levels of thinking. Teachers must also listen actively, ask for clarification, and connect students' viewpoints without providing direct answers. The critical, creative, and caring thinking subtheme indicates that teachers not only guide students in seeking answers but also help them evaluate reasons, consider alternatives, and respect others' viewpoints. Yalçın (2026), Schaffalitzky (2024), Moodley and Chetty (2025), Dessingué and Wagner (2025), and Feyman Gök et al. (2023) demonstrate that P4C facilitation involves developing critical thinking, generating ideas creatively, and showing care towards other participants. These

competencies enable teachers to create discussions that are rational, open, and mutually respectful.

The community of inquiry subtheme refers to teachers' ability to create a learning environment in which students can think and construct knowledge together. Lam (2021), Yalçın (2026), Wang and Wang (2026), Schou-Juul et al. (2023), Şişman et al. (2026), and Dessingué and Wagner (2025) show that teachers need to ensure that every student has an opportunity to participate, listen to peers' views, and evaluate ideas on the basis of reasons. Within a community of inquiry, teachers maintain the focus of the discussion while ensuring that the learning environment remains democratic and collaborative. The final subtheme is the management of facilitation sessions. This skill includes the ability to manage time, regulate turn-taking, select stimulus materials, and sustain student engagement. Clarke et al. (2025), Jensen (2025), Moodley and Chetty (2025), and Zou and Lee (2023) show that teachers must balance providing structure to the session with giving students the freedom to explore questions. Effective session management helps ensure that the dialogue remains focused and that all participants are able to contribute.

Challenges in Implementing P4C

The third research objective is to examine the challenges teachers face in implementing P4C in the classroom. The findings show that the effectiveness of P4C implementation is influenced by teachers' levels of knowledge and skills, time and resource constraints, and the cultural and institutional contexts of education.

The first subtheme is insufficient teacher knowledge, skills, and confidence. Lam (2023), Zappalà and Smyth (2021), Schaffalitzky (2024), and Jensen (2025) show that some teachers experience difficulty in posing appropriate questions, managing students' responses, and avoiding excessive control of the discussion. Teachers may also understand the general concept of critical thinking but have limited knowledge of how to apply it through classroom activities. The second subtheme is time, resource, and technology constraints. Clarke et al. (2025), Jensen (2025), and Richards et al. (2026) show that P4C implementation requires sufficient time for meaningful dialogue to develop. Curriculum demands, a lack of stimulus materials, large class sizes, and limited technological facilities can adversely affect implementation. In online dialogue, teachers also face difficulties in assessing students' actual levels of engagement and experience.

The third subtheme concerns cultural, curricular, and institutional contexts. Richards et al. (2026), Liu and Yoon (2025), Lombardi et al. (2022), and Feyman Gök et al. (2023) show that the P4C approach needs to be adapted to local cultural backgrounds, education systems, and curricular requirements. Some school cultures continue to emphasise teacher authority, fixed answers, and examination performance. These conditions can make it difficult to implement open dialogue that gives students the freedom to question, disagree, and express alternative viewpoints.

Discussion

The discussion of the findings is organised according to the three research objectives: analysing how Philosophy for Children (P4C) training helps teachers improve their skills as facilitators of critical thinking, identifying facilitation skills developed through P4C training,

and examining challenges in classroom implementation. Based on the narrative synthesis and thematic analysis of the 20 articles selected through the SLR process, three main themes were identified: teacher transformation through P4C training, teacher facilitation competencies, and challenges in implementing P4C. The development of these themes is consistent with the analytical approach used in the study, which combined codes relating to changes in teachers' roles, questioning and dialogue skills, communities of inquiry, teacher confidence, and constraints involving time, curriculum, resources, and organisational support.

Teacher Transformation and Professional Learning

One of the main themes identified in this SLR is teacher transformation through Philosophy for Children (P4C) training. The findings indicate that P4C training can transform the teacher's role from the direct transmission of knowledge to facilitating students' thinking, dialogue, and knowledge construction. In this context, teachers do more than deliver lesson content; they are responsible for creating a safe and open learning environment, asking questions that stimulate thinking, encouraging students to provide reasons, and managing discussions without dominating the direction of the dialogue. This transformation also changes the teacher-student relationship towards a more collaborative form, in which teachers and students participate together in evaluating ideas, comparing viewpoints, and constructing understanding through a community of inquiry.

These findings are supported by previous studies showing that training and professional support play an important role in helping teachers master dialogic and inquiry-based approaches. Lam (2021) found that P4C training improved teachers' ability to conduct dialogic teaching, develop suitable teaching materials, reflect on their own practices, and transfer P4C strategies to other subjects. Jirásek and Jágerová (2024) similarly found that teachers implementing P4C began to view themselves as facilitators or co-participants in the inquiry process. This finding is consistent with Lam (2023), who emphasised that P4C training accompanied by sustained support improves the effectiveness of dialogic and inquiry-based teaching. In addition, Sedova et al. (2016) found that professional development focused on dialogic teaching increased teachers' use of open-ended questions and students' use of reasoned responses, while Calcagni et al. (2023) showed that changes in dialogic practice become more meaningful when teachers are given opportunities to reflect on and inquire systematically into their own practice.

Research on teacher transformation through P4C training is important because pedagogical change does not occur solely through theoretical exposure or short-term workshops. Teachers require an ongoing professional learning process that integrates practical training, observation, feedback, reflection, and support from trainers or colleagues. Without such support, teachers may understand P4C conceptually while continuing to rely on traditional teacher-centred instructional patterns. Research of this kind is therefore needed to explain how P4C training actually influences changes in teachers' beliefs, roles, and pedagogical practices and to identify the most effective forms of training for sustaining such transformation in classroom practice. These findings also provide a basis for educational institutions and policymakers to design more systematic, practical, and continuous P4C professional development programmes.

Dialogue, Questioning and Active Listening

The second theme is teacher facilitation competencies, which encompass dialogue and questioning skills, active listening, the development of critical, creative, and caring thinking, the formation of a community of inquiry, and the management of facilitation sessions. These skills are interrelated because the effectiveness of P4C depends on teachers' ability to facilitate open discussion without allowing the session to lose focus.

The ability to ask questions is one of the key competencies in P4C facilitation. Teachers need to move from questions that merely test recall towards open-ended questions that ask students to provide reasons, clarify meanings, compare viewpoints, and consider alternative possibilities. Questions such as “Why do you think that?”, “What reasons support that view?”, and “Are there circumstances in which that view might not be accurate?” can help students develop deeper thinking.

However, questioning in P4C is not simply a matter of preparing a list of questions in advance. Teachers need to listen to students' responses and formulate follow-up questions based on the ideas expressed. In this regard, Schaffalitzky (2024) found that trainee teachers experienced difficulty in supporting students' reasoning and interaction and in abandoning the habit of controlling discussions. Nevertheless, supervised training enabled them to improve their skills in facilitating philosophical dialogue.

These findings are also supported by Cui and Teo (2023), who found that several dialogic teacher moves—such as opening space for multiple answers, extending students' responses, and returning questions to students—can stimulate critical thinking. Therefore, the effectiveness of teachers' questions is determined not only by their level of difficulty but also by how they are used to extend thinking and connect ideas among participants.

In addition to questioning, active listening is a fundamental component of P4C. Teachers need to attend to the content, reasons, and assumptions contained in students' viewpoints before responding. Active listening enables teachers to identify ideas that can be developed, contradictions that can be examined, and viewpoints that can be connected to the contributions of other participants.

In traditional approaches, teachers may focus more on the correctness of answers and immediately correct students' responses. In contrast, P4C facilitators need to suspend judgement and first ask students to explain their thinking. This practice helps build trust because students feel that their views are heard and evaluated on the basis of reasons rather than solely on whether they match the teacher's answer. The shift in the teacher-student relationship towards a more partnership-based relationship, as identified by Jirásek and Jágerová (2024), reinforces the importance of active listening within a community of inquiry.

Critical, Creative and Caring Thinking

The SLR findings show that P4C facilitation competencies also include teachers' ability to guide critical, creative, and caring thinking. Critical thinking occurs when students evaluate reasons, identify assumptions, and make judgements. Creative thinking involves generating new possibilities or perspectives, while caring thinking emphasises respect, empathy, and a willingness to consider the effects of one's views on others.

Dessingué and Wagner (2025) found that teachers use two complementary pathways to develop critical thinking: dialogic activities and the development of metacognitive awareness. This finding indicates that discussion alone does not necessarily produce critical thinking. Teachers also need to help students become aware of how they construct a viewpoint, why they accept or reject a reason, and whether their thinking processes need to be improved.

Thus, facilitating critical thinking should not be equated with merely asking students to express opinions. A viewpoint needs to be developed through reasons, evidence, examples, comparisons, and evaluation of alternative viewpoints. At the same time, teachers need to ensure that the discussion does not become a debate aimed at defeating others. The goal of a community of inquiry is to seek a more reasonable understanding through shared thinking.

Community of Inquiry and Session Management

A community of inquiry is the central structure of P4C implementation. Within this community, students do more than answer the teacher's questions; they listen to peers' ideas, develop viewpoints based on previous contributions, express disagreement respectfully, and remain willing to revise their views when stronger reasons are presented.

The teacher's role is to create a balance between freedom and structure. If the teacher exercises too much control, the dialogue reverts to one-way instruction. Conversely, if the teacher is too passive, the discussion may not reach a meaningful level of reasoning. Teachers therefore need to manage turn-taking, connect viewpoints, return the discussion to the central question, and ensure that less active students are also given opportunities to participate.

The findings of Lam (2021, 2023) show that P4C training helps teachers recognise students' capacity to construct knowledge through dialogic inquiry. This is important because teachers' beliefs about students' abilities influence the extent to which they are willing to relinquish some control over the discussion.

Managing P4C sessions also requires teachers to make real-time decisions based on the direction of the discussion. Teachers need to determine when an idea should be explored in greater depth, when the discussion should shift, how conflicts of viewpoint should be addressed, and how time should be allocated equitably. Management challenges become more apparent when P4C is implemented online. Schou-Juul et al. (2023) found that children can experience online philosophical dialogue as meaningful, collaborative, and supportive.

However, facilitators tend to underestimate participants' positive experiences. This finding suggests that teachers should not rely solely on their own interpretations when evaluating the effectiveness of a session. Student evaluations, third-party observations, session recordings, and post-lesson reflection can provide a more accurate picture.

Implementation Challenges and Context

The third theme concerns challenges in implementing P4C, including insufficient teacher knowledge and confidence, difficulty moving beyond traditional roles, time and resource constraints, and the influence of curriculum, culture, and school organisation.

One of the main challenges is teachers' difficulty in shifting from being providers of answers to becoming facilitators. Schaffalitzky (2024) showed that teachers not only face difficulties in supporting students' reasoning, but that their self-assessments of facilitation performance are not always accurate. Some teachers may believe that a session has gone well because students provided many responses, even though those responses may not necessarily contain reasons, peer-to-peer interaction, or collaborative construction of ideas.

These findings indicate that teacher confidence alone is not a sufficient indicator of competence. P4C training needs to include clear facilitation criteria, examples of practice, microteaching, observation, and feedback from trainers. Video recordings can also be used so that teachers can review their questioning patterns, the amount of time they speak, the distribution of turns, and how they respond to students.

P4C implementation requires time because students need opportunities to understand the stimulus, formulate questions, express viewpoints, and evaluate reasons. Pressure to complete the syllabus can cause dialogue sessions to be viewed as less important than content instruction. Wang and Wang (2026) showed that teachers in Chinese school contexts tend to use P4C in non-core sessions to develop higher-order thinking skills, while regular subject teaching remains more teacher-centred in order to meet curricular requirements. This finding demonstrates that teachers' practices are shaped not only by individual training but also by curriculum structures and the measures of achievement used by institutions.

In addition to time, teachers require suitable stimulus materials, questioning guides, administrative support, and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues. If P4C depends solely on the interest of an individual teacher without school support, its implementation may be inconsistent. A whole-school approach is therefore more appropriate than isolated implementation because a culture of dialogue needs to be supported through timetable planning, resource sharing, and joint professional development.

P4C originated from an educational tradition that emphasises open dialogue and the freedom to raise questions. However, the approach needs to be adapted to local cultures, languages, values, and educational structures. Adaptation does not mean changing the foundations of P4C; rather, it means ensuring that stimulus materials, discussion issues, and forms of interaction are appropriate to participants' experiences.

Wang and Wang (2026) highlighted tensions between P4C and curriculum norms, teacher-centred approaches, and local philosophical traditions. This situation indicates that P4C should not be transferred mechanically from one context to another. Teachers need the flexibility to use stories, concepts, moral questions, and experiences that are close to students' lives while maintaining core elements such as open questioning, reason-giving, and respect for diverse viewpoints. In the Malaysian educational context, these findings imply that P4C or Hikmah Pedagogy training should take into account local values, etiquette in dialogue, religious and cultural sensitivities, and curricular requirements. Contextual adaptation is not an obstacle to critical thinking; rather, it helps ensure that the inquiry process is implemented responsibly and meaningfully for students.

Implementation Fidelity and Outcomes

The effectiveness of P4C should also be discussed critically. The first evaluation by the Education Endowment Foundation reported positive effects on certain areas of attainment and on skills such as confidence in speaking and listening. However, a subsequent larger-scale trial found no effect on overall academic attainment. These differences do not necessarily demonstrate that P4C is ineffective; rather, they indicate that the effects of an approach may vary according to the quality of training, consistency of implementation, duration of the intervention, and school context.

Based on this comparison, the effectiveness of P4C should not be evaluated solely according to the existence of a module or the number of teachers who attend training. Evaluation should examine whether teachers actually use open-ended questions, provide adequate wait time, encourage students to build on peers' ideas, and conduct sessions regularly. This is an inference from the differences between the trial outcomes: implementation quality and fidelity are likely to mediate the relationship between teacher training and student learning outcomes.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies are recommended to examine students' perspectives, compare pre-service and in-service teachers, and include larger samples from different types of schools and geographical locations. Mixed-methods and longitudinal studies would also be appropriate for evaluating actual changes and the sustainability of teachers' facilitation skills after P4C training.

In addition, research could focus on the influence of administrative support, school culture, class size, curriculum workload, and the use of technology. The development and testing of P4C training modules suited to the Malaysian educational context are also recommended to strengthen questioning skills, active listening, dialogue management, and the facilitation of communities of inquiry.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the role of teachers as facilitators through Philosophy for Children (P4C) training, particularly in relation to improving critical thinking facilitation, developing facilitation competencies, and addressing implementation challenges in the classroom. As this study is a systematic literature review, the findings are based on the analysis of 20 selected articles and do not involve direct data collection from teachers or students.

The analysis generated three main themes: teacher transformation through P4C training, teacher facilitation competencies, and challenges in implementing P4C. Overall, P4C training has the potential to help teachers shift from transmitting knowledge to facilitating dialogue, questioning, critical thinking, and communities of inquiry. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of implementation is influenced by teachers' skill levels, confidence, time, resources, curriculum, and school support. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for teachers, educational institutions, and training developers in designing P4C approaches that are more systematic and appropriate to the Malaysian educational context.

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