

Encouraging Student Question-Asking in Primary Classrooms: Teachers' Strategies, Behaviors, and Assessment Techniques

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the strategies, assessment techniques, and classroom behaviors that primary school teachers employ to encourage student question-asking, a critical component of active and meaningful learning. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with nine classroom teachers selected via purposive sampling, the study adopts a phenomenological approach to understand how educators foster inquiry in their daily practices. The findings reveal ten key themes that reflect teacher efforts to promote question-asking, including encouraging active participation, addressing diverse learning styles, enabling students to formulate their own questions, and overcoming student shyness. Teachers reported using visual aids, storytelling, group discussions, drama, peer questioning, and feedback techniques tailored to individual learners. Additionally, teacher behaviors—such as verbal encouragement, maintaining eye contact, and empathetic listeningwere found to cultivate supportive learning environments conducive to curiosity and self-expression. The study concludes that student questioning is influenced by the alignment of instructional strategies with students' cognitive and affective needs. It recommends sustained professional development focused on inquiry-based pedagogy to expand students' questioning capacities and support the formation of democratic, student-centered classrooms.

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INTRODUCTION

Assessment in education encompasses a wide range of practices. Among these, classroom-based assessment approaches, which focus increasingly on the essence of learning, have gained prominence in recent years. Commonly referred to in the literature as "assessment for learning," this approach represents a vital component of the teaching and learning process (Chen et al., 2017). For assessment for learning to be effective in classroom practice, it is crucial that teachers adopt its fundamental

strategies. These strategies can be categorized into four main areas: sharing learning intentions and success criteria; encouraging students to ask questions and participate in class discussions; providing feedback; and facilitating peer and self-assessment (İnönü & Demircan, 2023). Of these, encouraging students to ask questions and engage in classroom discussions plays a critical role in enhancing the learning process, promoting deep understanding, and increasing student participation.

The shift from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction has introduced a new perspective on questioning approaches within the classroom. This perspective emphasizes not only students' responses to teacher-posed questions but also their ability to generate their own questions and take charge of their own learning processes (Eshach et al., 2014). While many studies have explored the relationship between teacher questioning and student learning by observing, describing, and analyzing this dynamic, less attention has been paid in the literature to students' question-asking behaviors and the role these questions play in knowledge construction. In other words, researchers have predominantly focused on how teachers ask questions and how students respond, often overlooking the pedagogical value of fostering students' own inquiry skills. Conceptual and empirical studies emphasizing the importance of students' question-asking classify its benefits into five categories: learning, cognitive development, metacognitive development, affective development, and increased interaction. Students engaged in questioning benefit from producing explanations for problems in their minds, clarifying concepts, highlighting key points, and developing problem-solving skills (Tay et al., 2019).

In teacher-directed classroom practices, it has been found that teachers who pose numerous questions per lesson often allocate the majority of these questions to recall and procedural knowledge, with fewer focusing on higher-order thinking. However, in constructivist learning environments, question flow occurs from teacher to student, student to student, and student to teacher (Dogan & Yucel-Toy, 2022). Teacher questioning serves to initiate lessons, capture student attention and interest, assess comprehension of concepts, and summarize the topic. Moreover, fostering student question-asking behavior is essential for promoting active learning, critical thinking, and deep understanding. The teacher's role is crucial in developing this behavior.

Creating a classroom environment where all students can overcome shyness and actively ask questions during discussions, facilitating interactive activities that encourage peer questioning, and providing effective feedback to increase student questioning are essential teacher responsibilities. To fulfill these roles, teachers must possess foundational knowledge and skills to encourage students to ask questions. The active application of this knowledge and these skills in classroom

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practice is a significant factor in cultivating student question-asking behavior (Soysal & Soysal, 2023).

In today's world, there is a growing need for individuals who think, research, investigate, solve problems, create, and contribute to humanity according to their abilities. The fundamental aim of education is to prepare students for life by equipping them with higher-order skills that meet this need. In this context, question-asking leads students to make sense of, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, transform, and infer from what they read and hear, ultimately enabling them to generate new knowledge, especially through creative reproduction (Mandasari et al., 2025). While many studies have examined the relationship between teacher questioning and student learning in classroom settings, far fewer have addressed students' own question-asking and the internalization of knowledge by students. Depriving students of question-asking skills may lead them to become passive recipients of knowledge rather than active learners who develop their own understanding throughout their education and beyond. Students' ability to ask their own questions is vital for fostering awareness of cognitive processes, developing self-regulation skills, ensuring learning autonomy, and guiding and managing their own learning (Hastomo et al., 2025).

Beyond learning, other cognitive motivations underlying question-asking include knowledge gaps, the need for information, and perplexities arising from abnormal events, contradictions, confusions, or inconsistencies (Wang et al., 2017). Students' responses also reflect processes of self-regulation. The acquisition of question-asking behavior is important across all levels of education; however, the primary and secondary school periods represent critical phases for developing students' questioning skills. Therefore, it is essential to primarily encourage questioning behavior during early educational stages. Accordingly, this study was conducted with classroom teachers.

The study aims to investigate, based on classroom teachers' experiences, the strategies and techniques teachers employ to promote question-asking behavior among students in the classroom. In line with this objective, the research questions are as follows:

- 1. What assessment techniques used by teachers affect the frequency and quality of students' questions?
- 2. What teacher behaviors within the classroom influence students' question-asking frequency and quality?
- 3. On what factors do students' question-asking frequency and quality depend?

METHOD

Research Design

A qualitative research design was adopted (Hamilton & Finley, 2019), and semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers. A phenomenological

approach was utilized to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' assessment techniques, classroom behaviors, and students' question-asking frequency, as well as to explore teachers' lived experiences. This approach focuses on understanding participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings.

Participants

The study group consisted of nine primary school classroom teachers selected via purposive sampling. Gender, teaching experience, and the geographic location of the school were used as criteria in the selection process. The participants' professional experience ranged from 6 to 39 years.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview form covered the methods teachers use to encourage students' question-asking in the classroom, adaptations to accommodate different learning styles, strategies to enable students to formulate their own questions, effective assessment techniques for enhancing questioning skills, verbal and non-verbal cues, strategies for overcoming student reticence, methods to identify misunderstandings, approaches to evaluate the frequency of students' questions, and strategies to assess the academic relevance of questions and their potential impact on lesson progression and student comprehension. To maintain confidentiality, teachers were coded as PT-1, PT-2, PT-3, PT-4, PT-5, PT-6, PT-7, PT-8, PT-9.

The interview protocol was developed based on a review of relevant literature. Interviews were conducted online via the Zoom platform, which allowed overcoming geographical limitations, enabled access to a wider participant pool, and provided participants with increased flexibility and convenience. The duration of interviews ranged from 20 to 40 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through content analysis. Content analysis was employed to identify themes capable of explaining the qualitative data collected. During the coding process, two researchers independently read and examined concepts relevant to the study's aims. Identified words and concepts were compared and coded. Finally, themes consistent with concepts established in the literature review were derived.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the experiences of classroom teachers, ten distinct themes emerged from the teachers' experiences regarding the strategies and techniques they use to foster students' question-asking behavior. The primary aim of this study is to

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understand how teachers implement these strategies in the classroom and, based on the insights gained, to enrich pedagogical practice. The detailed themes below focus on the key strategies and techniques revealed through the study.

1. Encouraging Active Student Participation

One prominent strategy identified for promoting students' question-asking behavior is encouraging their active participation. This approach aims to engage students more deeply in lessons, prompting them to think critically and formulate questions. Classroom teachers articulated the following examples of fostering active engagement:

- 1) "I ask my students to tell stories and fairy tales. I pause the story halfway, and the student then poses a question to the entire class, which everyone answers." (PT-1)
- 2) "Sometimes, I pretend to be a student, turning towards their desks and initiating a 'question storm,' where we brainstorm questions together as if we are asking each other." (PT-2)
- 3) "Rather than deciding the topic to cover, I discuss a theme and ask the children to infer the subject we will explore. For example, I ask what my narration reminds them of, and they provide various answers. This not only prepares them for the lesson but also increases their interest." (PT-4)
- 4) "On Fridays, during the last lesson, I hold a book reading hour as a homework assignment. Students generate at least five questions related to the books they read. First, they summarize the book, then we engage in Q&A." (PT-7)
- 5) "I frequently use question-and-answer discussions, written responses to questions, and question completion exercises." (PT-6)

Teachers use effective methods such as class discussions, storytelling linked to relevant topics, peer presentations about books they have read, and written communication in Q&A sessions to stimulate active participation. It can be inferred that teachers enhance classroom interactivity and student involvement by employing these interactive approaches.

2. Suitability for Different Learning Styles

The second theme, 'suitability for different learning styles,' reflects teachers' conscious efforts to tailor question-asking practices to accommodate diverse learners. The following excerpts illustrate this focus:

- 6) "I frequently use riddles, which help develop question-asking skills by posing riddles to the class. I also extensively use drama, which serves as a teaching technique where students best express themselves by asking and answering questions as well as listening." (PT-1)
- 7) "Riddles are, in my opinion, the best method because students enjoy them, especially the quick-witted answers." (PT-7)

- 8) "As classroom teachers, we cover multiple subjects and use different approaches for each." (PT-5)
- 9) "We have drama classes where I encourage all my students to speak in front of the group to build their self-confidence." (PT-4)
- 10) "We use cluster, i.e., group work, and also frequently prefer drama." (PT-6)

It was found that various assessment techniques such as riddles, visual materials, drama, presentations, and group work are utilized to encourage students to ask questions in ways that align with their individual learning preferences.

4. Enabling Students to Formulate Their Own Questions

The third theme focuses on classroom teachers' strategies to encourage students to formulate their own questions. One teacher remarked:

11) "Students are able to give presentations on a topic and engage in peer teaching, thereby allowing me to reach the entire class." (PT-2)

This statement suggests that by providing opportunities for students to present and teach their peers, the teacher fosters interactive learning within the classroom environment. Another notable comment from a teacher (PT-2) illustrates this further:

12) "I step aside, and they take turns being the teacher." (PT-2)

By assigning leadership roles to students and allowing them to take turns in teaching, the teacher cultivates a student-centered learning experience. Consequently, it can be concluded that assessment techniques such as presentations and drama are employed to facilitate students' ability to generate their own questions.

4. Development of Questioning Skills

This theme addresses how classroom teachers encourage and develop students' questioning skills. The following excerpts reflect the teachers' approaches:

- 13) "During group work, students are able to express themselves more." (PT-3)
- 14) "I think group work divides my students and creates cliques, so I tend to avoid it. They prefer whole-class discussions." (PT-4)

It is evident that assessment techniques including group work and classroom discussions are utilized to enhance students' questioning abilities.

5. Overcoming Shyness in the Classroom

Overcoming student shyness is crucial for fostering an interactive learning environment and encouraging participation from all students. Teachers build students' confidence, thereby increasing their willingness to ask questions and creating a positive learning experience. The following direct quotations from teachers illustrate their methods to help students overcome shyness:

15) "If questioning stops during the lesson, it means there is a problem." (PT-2)

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- 16) "I always applaud students who ask questions and frequently encourage them by saying, 'You can do it, my champion.' I make a point to call students by their names." (PT-4)
- 17) "I often tell them, 'I love you all.'" (PT-2)
- 18) "I use verbal praise." (PT-3)
- 19) "I have shy students present in front of the class and make sure to give every child a chance to speak during individual interactions. I do not favor group work when some students remain passive." (PT-4)
- 20) "In a healthy classroom environment, after a topic ends, questions should 'pop up' like popcorn; if not, it indicates a problem." (PT-8)

Teachers employ techniques such as smiling, using facial expressions to convey emotions, posing curiosity-inducing questions, verbal reinforcement, one-on-one conversations, and drama activities to reduce students' shyness.

6. Detecting Misunderstandings and Clarification Needs

Effective communication within the classroom is essential for the learning process, yet misunderstandings are inevitable. Teachers employ various strategies to detect misunderstandings and address students' needs for clarification. This theme concentrates on how teachers enhance student-teacher communication by actively identifying such issues. Teachers' comments on their approaches include:

- 21) "I provide immediate, real-time feedback." (PT-2)
- 22) "I ask open-ended questions and, based on the students' feedback, I assign presentations to cover areas where understanding is lacking." (PT-4)
- 23) "I often wonder, 'Did I explain this wrong? Is it my explanation that caused misunderstanding?'" (PT-3)
- 24) "After explaining the topic, I encourage students to stop me and ask questions if they do not understand, to prevent building on incorrect information." (PT-7)
- 25) "During the lesson, I pause the explanation and ask students to pose questions to each other and propose discussion topics related to the subject." (PT-9)

Teachers prefer to obtain immediate feedback, use open-ended questions, and continuously reflect on their communication styles to identify and resolve misunderstandings in the classroom.

7. Providing Encouraging Feedback to Students

Providing encouraging feedback to students is a crucial element in enhancing motivation and strengthening students' self-confidence throughout the learning process. Within this theme, classroom teachers employ encouraging expressions to foster students' willingness to ask questions and to highlight their achievements. Examples of expressions used by teachers to provide encouraging feedback include:

- 26) "I congratulate you for your civic courage; well done, you are truly remarkable. Honestly, if you hadn't asked this question, I would have skipped it. I'm glad you enlightened me" (PT-2).
- 27) "This is excellent; I motivate them by saying it should be the question of the week" (PT-3).
- 28) "I address students by their names and make each of them feel special. I meet with each student individually and never discriminate—whatever I do for one, I do for all; I embrace all of them" (PT-4).
- 29) "Generally, children really appreciate words of honor and recognition" (PT-5).

It can be concluded that encouraging feedback, personalized address, reinforcement, and applause are key strategies used to motivate students to ask more questions during lessons.

8. Encouraging Questioning and Collaborative Learning Among Students

Promoting interaction among students and encouraging the habit of questioning one another are essential components in creating an active learning environment within the classroom. This theme focuses on various strategies employed by classroom teachers to support collaborative learning and to encourage students to ask questions of their peers. Teachers' expressions related to promoting peer questioning include:

- 30) "Conducting debates with first and second graders is very difficult, but for fourth graders, it is indispensable and a technique I use in most lessons. Similarly, in forums, and additionally through drama methods, students ask each other many questions" (PT-1).
- 31) "When working collaboratively, students ask each other more questions" (PT-3).
- 32) "I distribute sheets to each student and ask them to write five questions related to the topic, including their full name at the bottom. I collect these sheets, take them home for thorough review, and the next day, as feedback, students who write the questions and answers correctly ask three selected questions to their peers. For students with incomplete responses, I meet with them individually to help identify learning gaps. Subsequently, students begin asking these prepared questions to each other. Each correct answer is met with applause and stars, and at the end of the term, the student with the most stars receives a reward" (PT-8).

It has been identified that group work, drama, peer questioning, debates, and forums are interactive activities frequently utilized to encourage students to ask questions among themselves within the classroom setting.

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9. Taking Student Questions Seriously and Emphasizing Their Importance

Taking students' questions seriously is a fundamental component in fostering a trusting learning environment and empowering students to freely express their thoughts. This theme focuses on teachers' expressions that highlight their recognition and earnest consideration of student questions. Examples of teachers' statements reflecting the seriousness and value attributed to student inquiries include:

- 33) "Students must feel comfortable speaking in class. If we belittle or silence their expressions, they will stop participating. They fear being reprimanded or humiliated by their peers." (PT-4)
- 34) "When students feel loved, they genuinely ask questions without hesitation." (PT-5)
- 35) "One popular behavior I use is saying 'let's do a high five' and gently pinching their cheeks, saying 'well done, my child.' A parent once called me saying their child was very happy because I showed affection to their cheek." (PT-8)
- 36) "I always listen attentively and seriously. For every question each student asks, I respond with comments such as 'I never thought of it from that perspective; you asked very insightful questions.' Then I encourage them: 'Let's ask your classmates what they think about your question.'" (PT-9)

The findings reveal that teachers employ behaviors such as maintaining eye contact, empathetic listening, expressing gratitude, and addressing students by name to convey that their questions are taken seriously and valued.

10. Evaluation of Question Frequency and Quality

The frequency with which students ask questions and the quality of those questions serve as key indicators of engagement and comprehension within the learning process. This theme examines classroom teachers' evaluations of students' questioning habits and the nature of their inquiries. Sample statements from teachers regarding this evaluation include:

- 37) "Questions arise not only to understand the topic but also to explore related concepts; sometimes even questions that challenge me, prompting further research, and we learn together." (PT-3)
- 38) "My students constantly ask questions. I encourage those who hesitate to ask immediately when they do not understand. I tell them that asking questions is a sign of intelligence, and I always welcome their inquiries. Students who do not ask questions are those who do not understand, while those who understand do ask." (PT-4)
- 39) "In Life Skills classes, students often ask non-academic questions related to everyday life, while in Math they tend to ask more academically focused questions." (PT-5)

- 40) "My philosophy is to prepare students for society before academic success. A socially prepared student is responsible, confident, capable of expressing their ideas easily, inquisitive, and self-aware." (PT-6)
- 41) "Sometimes a single student question perfectly encapsulates the entire lesson for the class." (PT-7)
- 42) "When a student asks an off-topic question at a critical moment, it risks distracting others. As a teacher, I cannot leave such a question unanswered; I respond quietly while maintaining eye contact, then refocus the class and continue. As a teacher, even off-topic questions must be addressed." (PT-8)
- 43) "As questions related to the topic increase, so do the students' learning levels and curiosity. The more questions they ask, the more their self-confidence and willingness to participate grow." (PT-9)
- 44) "Because younger children have vivid imaginations, their questions may sometimes stray from the topic. Addressing these queries is important to enhance lesson effectiveness." (PT-9)

Teachers reported that students enjoy asking questions frequently. While the nature of questions varies across age groups, the tendency to ask questions begins early and remains strong. This suggests that providing supportive environments for question-asking at young ages establishes the foundation for academic inquiry in later stages. To cultivate questioning habits, primary education should include activities that positively influence and encourage students' attitudes toward asking questions.

To promote student questioning, teachers should design activities that develop critical thinking and participation, assign question-preparation tasks, foster a supportive and comfortable classroom atmosphere, actively listen to student questions, acknowledge their inquiries, model questioning behavior, and adopt a multifaceted approach.

Frequent questioning enables teachers to assess student understanding and measure performance effectively. Teachers also emphasized that student questions help them identify students' imaginations, learning styles, interests, and cognitive levels. Pedagogically, student questions contribute to linking topics with other disciplines, deepening students' knowledge, increasing interaction, shifting away from teacher-centered instruction, maintaining students' attention, and creating a dynamic classroom environment. Additionally, from a content knowledge perspective, student questions motivate teachers to prepare more thoroughly, recognize gaps in their knowledge and skills, and strive for continuous professional development.

Overall, fostering an active and democratic classroom environment where students are encouraged to ask frequent, high-quality questions supports their intellectual growth. These findings were derived from a purposive sample and

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portray an idealized model of teacher behaviors aimed at encouraging student inquiry. There remains a need for broader, participatory research to better understand common practices and strategies that effectively promote questionasking in classrooms.

Discussion

In the discussion section of this study, three primary themes were identified to analyze and interpret the findings. First, the assessment techniques employed by teachers to encourage student questioning within the classroom were examined. Subsequently, teachers' classroom behaviors were analyzed in detail, evaluating classroom interactions and teacher–student relationships from various perspectives. Finally, the frequency of student questioning and the quality of the questions posed were addressed. Through analyses under these three main themes, the study sheds light on its overarching objectives and provides recommendations on how teaching processes can be managed more effectively.

1. Teachers' Assessment Techniques

To promote student questioning, teachers organize class discussions, share relevant stories, provide opportunities for students to narrate or write about books they have read, and support these activities with question-and-answer sessions (Wang et al., 2017). To accommodate diverse learning styles, teachers employ various methods including the use of visual aids, riddles, dramatic techniques, and group work. This diversity allows students to engage and ask questions in environments that best fit their individual learning preferences.

To facilitate students' ability to formulate their own questions, teachers utilize project-based learning, open-ended questioning, group work, and debate panels. Project-based learning offers students the chance for in-depth exploration of specific topics; open-ended questioning fosters critical thinking and encourages independent question formulation; group work promotes collaboration and interaction; and debate panels bring together different perspectives, enriching students' questioning skills. Collectively, these varied approaches provide students with a broad framework to develop their questioning abilities.

Moreover, teachers reported using techniques such as classroom discussions, presentations, and written question-posing to enhance students' questioning skills. These techniques contribute to students generating more sophisticated questions, supporting their personal development, accelerating learning, and expanding and deepening their knowledge within disciplinary domains.

2. Teachers' Classroom Behaviors

Teachers encourage student questioning through smiling, using facial expressions to convey emotions, posing curiosity-arousing questions, verbal

reinforcement, one-on-one conversations, and drama methods (Stokhof et al., 2017). To help students overcome shyness in asking questions, teachers employ encouraging phrases, verbal praise, and drama techniques.

To identify students' misunderstandings or areas needing clarification, teachers conduct individual and group interviews and provide concise topic summaries. Encouraging more frequent student questioning involves providing supportive feedback, reinforcement, and applause. To promote peer questioning, methods such as group work, drama, debates, and forums are utilized. Teachers foster an active and democratic classroom environment by taking student questions seriously and responding attentively through eye contact, empathetic listening, expressing gratitude, and addressing students by name. Such an environment encourages more frequent and higher-quality questions, contributing to students' intellectual development.

Responses provided by teachers to student questions were found to increase student satisfaction and happiness. Positive reinforcement behaviors—including maintaining eye contact, nodding, and affirming—were observed to encourage further questioning. Conversely, the study also identified teacher behaviors that hinder student questioning, such as displaying tension, showing discomfort with questions, leaving questions unanswered, rushing the lesson, cutting off questions prematurely, avoiding eye contact, not allocating sufficient time for questions, distancing themselves from students, and using a sarcastic tone. Students who were reprimanded, belittled, or silenced by teachers, family, or peers exhibited behaviors such as shyness, withdrawal, inability to express themselves, and low self-confidence, which inhibited their willingness to ask questions.

3. Frequency and Quality of Student Questioning

Participants reported that students frequently and enthusiastically ask questions during lessons. Most questions were academically oriented, though the nature of questions varied according to grade level, with some students posing academic questions sporadically (Wu et al., 2023). It was also noted that student questioning has the potential to influence lesson progression and students' comprehension levels. Furthermore, the capacity of questions to impact learning varies with students' levels of creative thinking.

Students who ask questions during class activities tend to engage in higherorder thinking by analyzing information and making conceptual connections, rather than merely memorizing facts. This active cognitive engagement supports the development of metacognitive skills and provides students with opportunities to advance their cognitive processes. When faced with novel problems, students' curiosity is stimulated, increasing their propensity to ask questions. As a result, curious, confident, open-minded, self-assessing, and academically conscientious student behaviors were observed. The motivation behind students' questions was

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identified as a need to acquire knowledge, resolve knowledge gaps, address cognitive conflicts, inconsistencies, and confusion (Soysal & Soysal, 2024).

Based on these findings, the development and implementation of in-service training programs focused on designing lessons that encourage student questioning, teaching students how to generate questions, and modeling effective questioning behaviors are recommended as significant contributions to the field.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the frequency and quality of students' questions in the classroom are influenced by a combination of strategic assessment techniques, teacher behaviors, and contextual learning factors. Teachers employed diverse assessment strategies—such as the use of visual aids, drama activities, and group work—to cater to students' varying learning styles, which in turn encouraged more frequent and meaningful questioning. Furthermore, specific teacher behaviors, including smiling, expressive facial expressions, verbal encouragement, curiositydriven questioning, and personalized interactions (such as using students' names and maintaining eye contact), were found to create a supportive atmosphere that fosters student confidence and curiosity. The findings also indicate that students' question-asking behaviors are shaped by factors such as the development of their questioning skills, opportunities for self-formulated inquiry, and classroom culture that values and takes their questions seriously. These insights highlight the importance of intentional pedagogical approaches in nurturing a classroom environment where student questioning is seen as both valuable and essential to learning. Future large-scale research is recommended to further explore these dynamics and identify widely effective practices.

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