The International Review of
Multidisciplinary Research
Advancing knowledge through quality research

# Reflective Questioning as a Pedagogical Strategy for Enhancing Student Engagement and Critical Thinking in the Life and Works of Rizal Course

**John Cliford M. Alvero**
San Pablo Colleges
jc.alvero@sanpablocolleges.edu.ph

**Abstract.** The increasing emphasis on learner-centered pedagogy in higher education necessitates instructional strategies that actively promote student engagement and higher-order thinking, particularly in humanities courses where reflective inquiry is essential. This study investigates the effectiveness of structured reflective questioning in The Life and Works of Rizal, a mandated general education course in the Philippines under Republic Act No. 1425. While the course plays a crucial role in cultivating historical consciousness, civic identity, and ethical reflection, classroom instruction has often remained lecture-driven, potentially constraining analytical engagement and deeper learning. Grounded in constructivist and reflective learning theories, the study examines how reflective questioning influences the cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions of student engagement, as well as the development of critical thinking skills. A descriptive quantitative research design was employed, involving 130 undergraduate students enrolled in the course. Data were collected through a validated 25-item survey instrument and analyzed using descriptive statistics across five domains: content comprehension, analytical reasoning, personal relevance, holistic learning experience, and instructional effectiveness. Findings reveal consistently high levels of student agreement, indicating that structured reflective questioning enhances conceptual understanding, facilitates critical analysis of Rizal's texts and socio-political contexts, and strengthens students' ability to connect historical themes to contemporary civic responsibility. Clarity of prompts, contextual relevance, and guided discussion were identified as key determinants of effectiveness. However, slightly lower ratings in emotional motivation and active participation suggest the need to integrate complementary dialogic and interactive strategies. Overall, the results support the integration of reflective questioning in humanities pedagogy to foster critical inquiry, meaningful engagement, and transformative learning outcomes.

## Introduction

Contemporary higher education has increasingly embraced learner-centered and reflective pedagogies that promote metacognition, critical inquiry, and autonomous learning. These paradigms are grounded in the premise that students construct knowledge more effectively when they are guided to reflect on their experiences, assumptions, and contextual realities (Lim, Hoe, & Zheng, 2022; Kong & Lin, 2023). Reflection-based approaches have been shown to enhance conceptual understanding, professional identity, and lifelong learning skills across disciplines (Daff, Tame, & Sands, 2024). In the Asian context, institutional adoption of self-regulated learning (SRL) frameworks has resulted in measurable improvements in student engagement and cognitive depth (Kong & Lin, 2023). Philippine educators have likewise begun exploring reflective teaching models, particularly within general education courses such as The Life and Works of José Rizal, a subject mandated under Republic Act No. 1425. Recent innovations, including digital-based simulations and inquiry-oriented instruction,

*This article is subject to the journal's Corrections, Retractions, and Article Updates Policy, available at: https://tinyurl.com/ysnr3356*

have improved students' appreciation of Rizal's historical and moral vision (Bastida et al., 2024), suggesting the pedagogical promise of reflective integration in value-oriented humanities education.

Despite these advancements, many Philippine tertiary classrooms continue to rely on conventional lecture-based methods that privilege rote learning over analytical reflection. Courses anchored in national history, such as The Life and Works of José Rizal, often emphasize factual recall rather than cultivating civic consciousness and ethical reasoning (Aguilar, Macapagal, & Benitez, 2021). This instructional imbalance limits the course's transformative potential, reducing opportunities for students to interrogate how Rizal's ideals intersect with contemporary social realities. Empirical evidence suggests that while reflection enhances cognitive engagement, learners often operate at superficial levels of introspection without structured guidance (Lim et al., 2022). Furthermore, local studies highlight a persistent misalignment between intended curricular outcomes—such as patriotism and moral discernment—and the didactic strategies employed to achieve them (Aguilar et al., 2021). Consequently, the pedagogical use of structured reflective questioning remains underexplored in Rizal education, leaving a notable gap in Philippine scholarship on reflective learning in general education.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the pedagogical impact of structured reflective questioning in The Life and Works of José Rizal course. Specifically, it aims to determine how reflective questioning influences student engagement in its cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions. The study further investigates the extent to which guided reflection facilitates critical thinking, metacognitive awareness, and the ability to relate Rizal's writings to present-day sociopolitical contexts. By capturing both quantitative and qualitative indicators of student learning, the research intends to generate empirically grounded insights into how reflective questioning may transform a historically oriented subject into a dynamic site of ethical inquiry and civic formation.

This research contributes to the growing body of scholarship advocating for reflective and transformative pedagogies in higher education. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on reflective learning by applying it to a culturally significant and legally mandated general education course in the Philippines. Empirically, it builds upon Balmeo et al. (2024), who demonstrated that Rizal's martyrdom can inspire social and moral consciousness among students, by examining how structured reflection can operationalize such transformative effects within classroom instruction. The study also supports the claims of Daff et al. (2024) and Hartmann (2023) that reflective practice enhances analytical reasoning, ethical discernment, and professional growth. Practically, the findings will inform curriculum design and faculty development by providing evidence-based strategies for integrating reflective questioning into Rizal education. Ultimately, this study advances the goal of cultivating reflective, socially responsible, and critically engaged Filipino learners—embodying the intellectual and moral ideals espoused by José Rizal himself.

## Methodology

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to examine the pedagogical impact of structured reflective questioning on student engagement, critical thinking, and historical understanding in The Life and Works of Rizal course. The design was deemed appropriate as it allowed for the systematic collection and interpretation of data to describe existing conditions and patterns of student perceptions without manipulating variables. The approach was anchored in the constructivist and reflective learning frameworks, which emphasize that learners actively construct meaning through guided reflection and dialogue.

The study involved 130 undergraduate students enrolled in The Life and Works of Rizal at a private higher education institution in Laguna, Philippines, during the second semester of Academic Year 2024–2025. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation from various degree programs under the General Education cluster. Inclusion criteria required that participants completed at least half of the course at the time of data collection to ensure familiarity with reflective questioning strategies. The sample comprised 56% female and 44% male students, aged between 18 and 22 years, representing disciplines in education, business, and health sciences.

Data were collected using a 25-item researcher-developed questionnaire constructed based on literature on reflective pedagogy, student engagement, and critical thinking in higher education. The instrument was organized into five domains: (1) content understanding, (2) critical analysis, (3) personal connection and relevance, (4) overall learning experience, and (5) influencing factors in reflective questioning. Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 4 ("Strongly Agree"). The questionnaire underwent expert validation by five specialists in education, humanities, and research methodology to ensure content validity and cultural appropriateness. The internal consistency of the instrument was verified through a pilot test with 30 students, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.92, indicating excellent reliability.

Prior to data collection, formal approval to conduct the study was secured from the appropriate academic authorities of the institution. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, clearly emphasizing the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. The survey was administered online via Google Forms to facilitate efficient and secure data collection. Respondents were given one week to complete the instrument, after which the data were automatically recorded, organized, and coded for statistical analysis.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations, to determine the extent to which reflective questioning influenced each domain of student engagement and learning. The interpretation of means followed a pre-established descriptive scale aligned with the study's theoretical framework. Findings were subsequently synthesized to identify dominant trends, variations, and implications for curriculum enhancement and reflective pedagogy.

## Results and Discussion

This section collectively presents the findings and their interpretation, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the study's outcomes.

Table 1 indicates that the use of reflective questions in the course The Life and Works of Rizal was enhancing to a great extent (EGE), with an overall mean of 3.57 (SD = 0.57). The highest-rated indicator, "deepen my understanding of Rizal's key themes through reflective questions" (M = 3.60, SD = 0.54), shows that students primarily value reflective questioning for facilitating deeper comprehension of course content. Meanwhile, the lowest-rated indicator, "feel motivated to participate in the course because of reflective questions" (M = 3.53, SD = 0.61), suggests that while cognitive engagement is strong, emotional and behavioral engagement are slightly less affected. These results reveal that reflective questions serve effectively as cognitive tools that help students analyze and connect Rizal's ideas but may need to be paired with motivational strategies to sustain participation.

| Indicators<br>As a student, I believe that using reflective questions… | Mean | SD | VD/VI |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. deepen my understanding of Rizal's key themes through reflective questions. | 3.60 | 0.54 | SA |
| 2. engage more with the course content because of reflective questions. | 3.58 | 0.54 | SA |
| 3. retain information better through reflective questions. | 3.54 | 0.59 | SA |
| 4. feel motivated to participate in the course because of reflective questions. | 3.53 | 0.61 | SA |
| 5. clarify complex ideas through reflective questions. | 3.59 | 0.58 | SA |
| **Overall** | **3.57** | **0.57** | **EGE** |

*Legend:*
*4.00 – 3.26 – Strongly Agree (SA)/ Enhanced to a Great Extent (EGE); 3.25 – 2.51 – Agree(A)/ Enhanced to a Moderate Extent (EME);*
*2.50 – 1.76 – Disagree (D)/ Demonstrated to a Low Extent (ELE); 1.75 – 1.00 – Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not at all enhanced (NAE)*

*Table 1. Extent to which reflective questions enhance students' engagement and understanding*

The results are consistent with current literature emphasizing the role of reflection in promoting deep learning. According to Bailie and Gebre (2022), reflective learning enhances students' engagement by allowing them to relate course content to prior experiences, evaluate their understanding, and reframe perspectives. Similarly, Xu et al. (2023) emphasized that meaningful engagement is multidimensional—comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components—and that activities promoting critical reflection primarily strengthen cognitive engagement. However, these activities must be supported by emotionally engaging strategies to maintain participation. In addition, Li and Xue (2023) found in their meta-analysis that teacher–student relationships and positive classroom interactions significantly moderate students' overall engagement, highlighting that reflective questions should be embedded in an interactive and supportive learning environment.

In practical terms, these findings imply that instructors teaching The Life and Works of Rizal should continue using reflective questions to deepen understanding but should also integrate dialogic discussions, peer learning, or formative feedback mechanisms to enhance motivation. Reflective questioning, when balanced with emotional and participatory strategies, can therefore foster holistic engagement—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—leading to more meaningful learning experiences.

Table 2 shows that the use of reflective questions in The Life and Works of Rizal course developed students' critical thinking skills to a great extent (DGE), with an overall mean of 3.54 (SD = 0.53). The highest-rated indicator was "analyze Rizal's works more critically through reflective questions" (M = 3.56, SD = 0.53), while the lowest was "challenge my assumptions by answering reflective questions" (M = 3.52, SD = 0.53). The minimal gap between these means suggests a consistently positive perception of reflective questioning in enhancing students' analytical and evaluative thinking. Students appear to

benefit most from using reflective prompts to analyze Rizal's texts and contexts critically, although they show slightly less confidence in using such questions to examine their personal assumptions.

| Indicators<br>Through reflective questions, I was able to… | Mean | SD | VD/VI |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. analyze Rizal's works more critically through reflective questions. | 3.56 | 0.53 | SA |
| 2. develop stronger arguments in my answers because of reflective questions. | 3.54 | 0.54 | SA |
| 3. challenge my assumptions by answering reflective questions. | 3.52 | 0.53 | SA |
| 4. identify biases in historical events through reflective questions. | 3.52 | 0.52 | SA |
| 5. interpret primary sources more effectively by answering reflective questions. | 3.54 | 0.52 | SA |
| **Overall** | **3.54** | **0.53** | **DGE** |

*Legend:*
*4.00 – 3.26 – Strongly Agree (SA)/ Developed to a Great Extent (DGE); 3.25 – 2.51 – Agree(A)/ Developed to a Moderate Extent (DME);*
*2.50 – 1.76 – Disagree (D)/ Developed to a Low Extent (DLE); 1.75 – 1.00 – Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not at all developed (NAD)*

*Table 2. Extent to which reflective questions develop students' critical thinking and analytical skills*

This pattern aligns with recent research emphasizing that reflection is a key driver of higher-order thinking in higher education. Chan (2021) introduced the concept of reflection literacy, emphasizing that structured reflective activities help students not only make sense of disciplinary content but also engage in metacognitive inquiry—questioning their own biases and reasoning. This supports the present findings that reflective questions allow learners to interpret Rizal's works more deeply and evaluate historical contexts with a critical lens. Similarly, Indrašienė et al., (2023) found that reflective questioning in university settings strengthened students' ability to engage in argumentation and bias identification, confirming that reflection enhances both analytical reasoning and evaluative judgment. Furthermore, Golden (2023) demonstrated that self-study and reflective questioning promote critical self-awareness, which is essential for developing evidence-based arguments and contextual understanding—skills directly reflected in the high mean scores in Table 2.

Although all indicators fall within the "developed to a great extent" range, the slightly lower mean for "challenge my assumptions" suggests that while reflective questioning fosters analysis of texts, it may be less effective in prompting introspective critique. As Li and Xue (2023) argue, effective critical thinking requires both cognitive and self-regulative engagement—students must not only analyze external material but also reflect on their own perspectives. Thus, integrating reflective questions that explicitly target assumption-challenging and self-awareness could further strengthen students' higher-order reasoning and interpretive abilities in the study of Rizal's works and historical narratives.

Table 3 displays that the use of reflective questions has been notably effective in strengthening students' personal connection to and perceived relevance of José Rizal's life and works, with an overall mean of 3.61 (SD = 0.54), falling into the "Strengthened to a Great Extent" category. This suggests that students generally perceive that the reflective prompts enabled them to make meaningful links between the historical content and their own values or experiences. Reflective learning and pedagogy are well-documented in the literature as strategies for enhancing student engagement, personal relevance of learning, and identity formation (Machost & Stains, 2023; Sandhu, 2023). For example, Machost and Stains (2023) argues that reflective practices help learners transform mere academic content into personally meaningful experiences. In this way, your findings align with broader scholarly trends affirming that historically-oriented courses enriched by reflection are more likely to foster deeper connection.

Focusing on the highest indicator, the item "I can understand Rizal's influence on Filipino identity because of reflective questions" achieved a mean of 3.68 (SD = 0.49). This suggests that the strongest effect of the reflective questions was in helping students grasp the broader cultural and national significance of Rizal's life and works rather than only their personal value. The literature on history education underscores the importance of linking content to identity and cultural awareness: the study by Sandhu et al., (2023) found that school history experiences shaped young adults' national and ethnic identities significantly. Thus, the strong mean can be interpreted as an affirmation that when students are asked to reflect explicitly on how Rizal contributes to "Filipino identity," they are more apt to internalize that perspective. The implication for pedagogy is that reflective questions which explicitly engage students in exploring identity (e.g., "How does Rizal's work shape what it means to be Filipino?") may be especially potent.

| Indicators<br>Through reflective questions, I can... | Mean | SD | VD/VI |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. relate Rizal's life to my personal experiences through reflective questions. | 3.58 | 0.56 | SA |
| 2. connect with Rizal's ideals through reflective questions. | 3.56 | 0.54 | SA |
| 3. reflect on my values because of reflective questions. | 3.61 | 0.52 | SA |
| 4. appreciate the cultural significance of Rizal's works through reflective questions. | 3.63 | 0.56 | SA |
| 5. understand Rizal's influence on Filipino identity because of reflective questions. | 3.68 | 0.49 | SA |
| Overall | 3.61 | 0.54 | SGE |

*Legend:*
*4.00 – 3.26 – Strongly Agree (SA)/ Strengthened to a Great Extent (SGE);3.25 – 2.51 – Agree(A)/ Strengthened to a Moderate Extent (SME);*
*2.50 – 1.76 – Disagree (D)/ Strengthened to a Low Extent (SLE); 1.75 – 1.00 – Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not at all Strengthened (NAS)*

*Table 3. Extent to which reflective questions enhance students' personal connection*

On the lowest indicator, the item "I can connect with Rizal's ideals through reflective questions" scored a mean of 3.56 (SD = 0.54). Although this still falls within the "Strongly Agree" category, the slightly lower value suggests that while students feel they understand and appreciate Rizal's influence, bridging that understanding into a personal connection with his ideals appears somewhat less pronounced. Reflection scholarship points out that the shift from cognitive understanding to values-based internalization and personal enactment is a distinct challenge. For example, Radović et al. (2021) found that while students participated in prompted reflection during experiential learning and achieved higher levels of reflection, making personal connections to beliefs, values, and contextualized action remained more difficult than simply linking theory and practice. The implication for practice is clear: to move from understanding toward personal connection, educators should design reflective prompts that go beyond asking what ideals did Rizal hold? and instead ask how do these ideals resonate with you? and what actions might you take to embody one of those ideals today?. In other words, embedding prompts like "How can I live this ideal today?" may help deepen that connection and support transformation rather than just comprehension.

The results highlighted the strong effectiveness of reflective questions in this educational context, particularly in reinforcing cultural identity and relevance. To capitalize on this success, educators should craft reflective prompts that explicitly connect content to students' identities while scaffolding deeper value-based engagement and action-oriented thinking. Future research could explore the qualitative aspects of student reflections to better understand how they articulate these connections, or examine more directly the transition from comprehension to the personal embodiment of historical ideals. Table 4 reveals that students perceive the inclusion of reflective questions in the course fairly positively. The aggregated mean of 3.51 (SD = 0.57) falls within the "Strongly Agree/Perceived to a Great Extent" category (4.00–3.26) according to the legend, implying that, on average, students believe that reflective questions enrich their learning experience and engagement to a considerable degree. Moreover, individual item means cluster tightly between 3.47 and 3.56, which suggests a moderate yet consistent level of agreement across the indicators. In short, students' perceptions are generally high — they agree, and lean toward strongly agree, that reflective questions are valuable in the course.

| Indicators<br>As a student, I... | Mean | SD | VD/VI |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. find reflective questions valuable in my learning experience. | 3.56 | 0.53 | SA |
| 2. enjoy answering reflective questions. | 3.48 | 0.60 | SA |
| 3. participate more in discussions because of reflective questions. | 3.47 | 0.61 | SA |
| 4. find reflective questions thought-provoking. | 3.48 | 0.60 | SA |
| 5. improve my course performance through reflective questions. | 3.55 | 0.51 | SA |
| Overall | 3.51 | 0.57 | EGE |

*Legend:*
*4.00 – 3.26 – Strongly Agree (SA)/ Enhanced to a Great Extent (EGE); 3.25 – 2.51 – Agree(A)/ Enhanced to a Moderate Extent (EME);*
*2.50 – 1.76 – Disagree (D)/ Enhanced to a Low Extent (ELE); 1.75 – 1.00 – Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not at all enhanced (NAE)*

*Table 4. Extent to which reflective questions enhance students' learning experience and course engagement.*

Turning to the highest and lowest mean indicators, the highest mean is 3.56 for the statement "As a student, I ... find reflective questions valuable in my learning experience." This suggests that among the various facets of reflective questions' role, students most strongly endorse their value in the learning process. That high score aligns with literature that shows reflection can deepen learning: for example, Hartmann et al., (2023) describes how structured reflection across and between projects contributes to deeper student understanding. This indicates that students perceive reflective questions

as meaningful tools rather than mere activities. For teaching and curriculum practice, this implies that instructors should emphasize and make explicit the purpose of reflective questions (rather than simply inserting them) so students recognize their value. Embedding these questions tied to major tasks or assessments will likely strengthen their perceived relevance and effect. In terms of assessment, reflective questions might also be tied to formative assessment feedback loops, thereby reinforcing value.

On the other hand, the lowest mean, though not dramatically lower, is 3.47 for "participate more in discussions because of reflective questions." While still within the "Strongly Agree" band, the slightly reduced mean suggests that reflective questions may be less effective, in this cohort, at promoting increased participation in discussions compared to their perceived value or enjoyment. In other words, while students believe reflective questions are valuable and thought-provoking, they are somewhat less convinced that those questions lead them to participate more in class discussion. This resembles findings from studies of reflection and engagement: for instance, Lim et al. (2022) found that regular self-reflectors had higher motivation but barriers remained around translating reflection into participation. The implication here is that while the reflective questions enhance cognitive and affective engagement (value, enjoyment, thought-provoking), they may not automatically trigger behavioural engagement (discussion participation). Teaching practice could therefore respond by designing reflective questions that explicitly prompt peer interaction or discussion, for example by coupling individual reflections with small-group dialogue or embedding them into discussions. Curriculum design might include scaffolding reflection with peer-sharing sessions or instructor prompts to elicit discussion responses. Assessment practices would benefit from linking reflection with participation credit or structured discussion follow-ups to ensure movement from reflection to discourse.

The data revealed that students largely view reflective questions positively, especially in terms of value and enjoyment, but there is somewhat less (though still strong) effect on discussion participation. These findings dovetail with contemporary research on reflection's role in engagement and learning. For educators, the key takeaway is that reflective questions ought to be purposefully framed and integrated into both the assessment and discussion ecosystem of the course so they move beyond individual cognition to social and behavioural engagement. Improving teaching and learning effectiveness thus hinges on aligning reflective prompts with tasks, promoting peer discussion, and linking reflection outcomes to formative or summative assessment when appropriate.

Table 5 implies that students' perceptions of the influence of reflective questions in the study of José Rizal's life and works are generally high. All four indicators yield means ranging from 3.55 to 3.65 on a 4-point scale, with verbal descriptions of "Strongly Agree (SA)" (i.e., influenced to a great extent). The overall mean of 3.59 (SD = 0.52) falls well within the "Strongly Agree" band (4.00–3.26) according to the legend. This suggests that students broadly affirm that the use of reflective questions contributes meaningfully to their learning in this subject, indicating solid engagement and positive attitudes toward this pedagogical strategy.

| Indicators<br>As a student, I… | Mean | SD | VD/VI |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. learn better when reflective questions are clear. | 3.65 | 0.51 | SA |
| 2. find reflective questions effective when they are related to current events. | 3.62 | 0.50 | SA |
| 3. prefer reflective questions that are open-ended. | 3.55 | 0.53 | SA |
| 4. value reflective questions discussed during class. | 3.56 | 0.54 | SA |
| 5. benefit from feedback on my answers to reflective questions. | 3.58 | 0.51 | SA |
| **Overall** | **3.59** | **0.52** | **IGE** |

*Legend:*
*4.00 – 3.26 – Strongly Agree (SA)/ Influenced to a Great Extent (IGE); 3.25 – 2.51 – Agree(A)/ Influenced to a Moderate Extent (IME);*
*2.50 – 1.76 – Disagree (D)/ Influenced to a Low Extent (ILE); 1.75 – 1.00 – Strongly Disagree (SD)/ Not at all influenced (NAI)*

*Table 5. Extent to which different factors affect the effectiveness of reflective questions in fostering student engagement*

Looking at specific items, the highest mean (3.65; SD 0.51) corresponds to the statement: "As a student, I … learn better when reflective questions are clear." This finding points to the crucial role of question clarity in promoting deeper student engagement and comprehension. In other words, students appear to place the greatest value on the clarity of reflective questions as a facilitator of their learning experience. Clarity likely reduces cognitive load, allows faster orientation to the task, and enables more meaningful reflection rather than confusion. In the literature, the importance of clear and well-scaffolded reflective prompts has been emphasized; for example, Machost (2023) discusses how structured reflective practices support educators and learners alike by making the process more accessible and focused. At the same time, meta-analytic evidence shows that external factors such as teacher-student relationship and supportive teaching behaviour significantly influence student engagement (Li & Xue, 2023b). The implication for teaching is that when designing reflective questions—particularly in a course focused on Rizal's life and works—educators should invest time in writing questions

that are succinct, unambiguous, and orient students toward the intended depth of reflection. Curriculum developers may embed exemplars of high-clarity reflective prompts and build in scaffolding for their interpretation. Assessment practice could then include a pilot-run of reflective questions with student feedback on clarity before full implementation. Conversely, the lowest mean (3.55; SD 0.53) arises for the item: "As a student, I … prefer reflective questions that are open-ended." Although still in the "Strongly Agree" range, it is comparatively lower than the other items. This suggests that while students do favor open-ended reflective questions, their agreement is slightly less enthusiastic than for clarity, contextual relevance, or feedback. One interpretation is that students may recognize the value of open-ended questions for promoting critical thinking and deeper engagement, but perhaps they also value guidance and structure and may feel more comfortable when reflection is somewhat bounded or scaffolded. The literature supports the notion that while open-ended tasks enhance metacognitive engagement, they also require sufficient scaffolding to avoid student frustration (Jin et al., 2022). In a history and works of Rizal course, fostering open-ended reflection might therefore be best accompanied by teacher-led class discussion and exemplars of effective responses rather than leaving students to navigate entirely unstructured prompts. From an assessment standpoint, teachers might provide optional guiding sub-questions or reflection templates to assist students in navigating open-ended prompts while still permitting student agency and depth of thinking.

In sum, the data revealed that students respond positively to reflective questioning in their Rizal course, particularly valuing clarity of prompts, relevance to contextual matters (M = 3.62), and timely feedback (M = 3.58). To enhance teaching and learning, educators should design reflective questions that are clear, contextually relevant, and supported with prompt feedback. While open-ended questions are essential for deeper engagement, they should be carefully scaffolded to avoid ambiguity, especially in courses addressing historical and civic content like Rizal's life and works. Thoughtful integration of reflective questioning, aligned with assessment and feedback strategies, can significantly strengthen student engagement, critical thinking, and meaningful learning.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study affirm that reflective questioning serves as an evidence-based and transformative pedagogical strategy in enhancing student learning within The Life and Works of Rizal course. Reflective questions were found to deepen conceptual understanding, strengthen critical and analytical thinking, and facilitate meaningful connections between historical narratives and students' personal, cultural, and civic identities. This pedagogical approach effectively promotes cognitive engagement while also fostering values integration and self-reflection—key competencies aligned with the goals of higher education. However, the slightly lower scores in emotional and participatory engagement highlight the need for a more holistic instructional design that combines reflection with dialogic, feedback-oriented, and interactive learning practices. Overall, reflective questioning demonstrates strong potential as a learner-centered framework that cultivates intellectual depth, ethical reasoning, and civic consciousness—outcomes essential to contemporary tertiary education and nation-building.

It is recommended that higher education institutions systematically institutionalize reflective questioning as a core component of curriculum design, instruction, and assessment in general education courses, particularly in The Life and Works of Rizal. Educators should develop reflective prompts that are clear, contextually grounded, and open-ended to promote analytical rigor and value-based interpretation. Embedding reflection within interactive discussions, digital platforms, and performance-based assessments can further enhance student motivation and participation. Professional development programs focusing on reflective pedagogy, formative feedback, and assessment of reflective outputs are likewise crucial to ensure fidelity of implementation. Through these measures, reflective questioning can evolve from an instructional technique into a structured pedagogical framework that advances critical inquiry, learner autonomy, and transformative education—hallmarks of 21st-century, research-informed teaching practice.

## Acknowledgement

## Funding

## Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

## Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources as cited in the reference list.

## References

Aguilar, F. V., Macapagal, M. E. J., & Benitez, C. J. R. (2021). Learning without reading Noli me tángere: The Rizal Law in two public high schools. Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints, 69(3), 325–360. https://doi.org/10.1353/phs.2021.0022

Bailie, A. L., & Gebre, E. J. (2022). Students' conceptions of reflective learning: Understanding engagement in higher education. In J. C. Slotta, E. Bielaczyc, & Y. K. Lee (Eds.), Proceedings of the 15th International Conference of the Learning Sciences (ICLS 2022) (pp. 115–122). International Society of the Learning Sciences. https://repository.isls.org/bitstream/1/8432/1/ICLS2022_115-122.pdf

Balmeo, M. L., Cruz, C. D., & Del Rosario, R. J. (2024). The impact of Dr. Jose Rizal's martyrdom on students' commitment to social change and justice. Social Perspectives in Humanities Journal, 1(11), 55–67. https://doi.org/10.70558/SPIJSH.2024.v01.i11.24110

Bastida, E. L., Balbio, M. V. C., Digma, N. A., Ramones, G. Y., Baguinon, P. R. B., Gatdula, R. E., & Alvaran, C. R. C. (2024). Improving tertiary students' academic performance and appreciation of the Life and Works of José Rizal course through digital-based biographical museum simulation. International Journal on Open and Distance e-Learning, 10(1). https://doi.org/10.58887/ijodel.v10i1.265

Cairns, R. (2023). Historically consciousness curriculum inquiry. Curriculum Perspectives, 43, 81–84. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41297-023-00191-1

Chan, C. K. Y., & Lee, K. W. K. (2021). Reflection literacy: A multilevel perspective on the challenges of using reflections in higher education through a comprehensive literature review. Educational Research Review, 32, Article 100376. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.100376

Daff, L., Tame, C., & Sands, J. (2024). A course design approach that encourages reflective practice habits in a capstone accounting course. The International Journal of Management Education, 22(2), Article 100990. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2024.100990

Golden, B. (2023). Enabling critical thinking development in higher education through the use of a structured planning tool. Irish Educational Studies, 42(4), 949–969. https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2023.2258497

Hajisoteriou, C., Solomou, E. A., & Antoniou, M. (2023). What kind of history teaching may promote intercultural competence in culturally diverse societies? Teachers' reflections from a case of conflict. Frontiers in Education, 8, 1156518. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1156518

Hartmann, A., Vinke-de Kruijf, J., & van Weesep, R. (2023). Asking the right questions: The role of reflection for learning in and between projects. International Journal of Project Management, 41(5), 102494. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2023.102494

Indrašienė, V., Jegelevičienė, V., Merfeldaitė, O., Penkauskienė, D., Pivorienė, J., Railienė, A., & Sadauskas, J. (2023). Critical reflection in students' critical thinking teaching and learning experiences. Sustainability, 15(18), 13500. https://doi.org/10.3390/su151813500

Jin, X., Jiang, Q., Xiong, W., Feng, Y., & Zhao, W. (2024). Effects of student engagement in peer feedback on writing performance in higher education. Interactive Learning Environments, 32(1), 128–143. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2022.2081209

Kong, S. C., & Lin, T. (2023). Developing self-regulated learning as a pedagogy in higher education: An institutional survey and case study in Hong Kong. Heliyon, 9(9), e22115. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e22115

Li, J., & Xue, E. (2023). Dynamic interaction between student learning behaviour and learning environment: Meta-analysis of student engagement and its influencing factors. Behavioral Sciences, 13(1), 59. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13010059

Lim, R. B. T., Hoe, K. W. B., & Zheng, H. (2022). A systematic review of the outcomes, level, facilitators, and barriers to deep self-reflection in public health higher education: Meta-analysis and meta-synthesis. Frontiers in Education, 7, Article 938224. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.938224

Lim, R. B. T., Tan, C. G. L., Hoe, K. W. B., Teng, C. W. C., Müller, A. M., Azfar, J., Narayanasamy, S., & Liow, C. H. (2022). Correlates, motivating factors, and barriers of engaging in regular self-reflection among public health students in higher education—A mixed methods approach. Frontiers in Public Health, 10, 1023439. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.1023439

Machost, H., & Stains, M. (2023). Reflective practices in education: A primer for practitioners. CBE—Life Sciences Education, 22(2), Article 22-07-0148. https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.22-07-0148

Mollo, M., Iannaccone, A., Savarese, G., Pecoraro, N., Fasano, O., D'Elia, D., Manzi, F., & Moccia, G. (2022). Reflective activity as a promoter of awareness processes in college students: A study. Frontiers in Education, 7, 835391. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.835391

Radović, S., Firssova, O., & Vermeulen, M. (2021). Improving academic performance: Strengthening the relation between theory and practice through prompted reflection. Active Learning in Higher Education, 24(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/14697874211014411

Ross, M., Bohlmann, J., & Marren, A. (2024). Reflective writing as summative assessment in higher education: A systematic review. Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, 12(1). https://doi.org/10.56433/jpaap.v12i1.577

Sandhu, S., Harris, R., & Copsey-Blake, M. (2023). School history, identity and ethnicity: An examination of the experiences of young adults in England. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 55(2), 153–170. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2023.2184212

Xu, X., Shi, Z., Bos, N. A., & Wu, H. (2023). Student engagement and learning outcomes: an empirical study applying a four-dimensional framework. Medical Education Online, 28(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/10872981.2023.2268347

## Appendices

No appendices are included in this article