

RESEARCH

The HIRCM Model: Enhancing Critical Reading and Moral Reasoning in Southern Thailand's Multicultural Classrooms

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Abstract

In today's information-driven world, students must develop not only reading comprehension but also critical thinking and moral reasoning to become informed and ethical global citizens. This study aimed to enhance lower secondary students' critical reading and moral reasoning skills through the development and implementation of the HIRCM Interactive Learning Package, which integrates Hikmah Pedagogy, interactive learning, inquiry, reflection, and moral dilemma discussions. A quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was employed with 14 Grade 8 students in a multicultural lower secondary school in Thailand's southern border provinces. Research instruments included the HIRCM learning package, critical reading achievement tests, classroom observation checklists, student satisfaction questionnaires, and open-ended interview forms. The findings revealed that the learning package exceeded the 80/80 efficiency benchmark ($E1 = 82.14$, $E2 = 82.67$), and students' post-test scores showed a statistically significant improvement over their pre-test scores ($p < .05$). Observations confirmed that students demonstrated high levels of moral reasoning, including empathy, fairness, and cultural awareness. Thematic analysis of student reflections highlighted the development of analytical thinking, appreciation for multicultural perspectives, and the ability to apply reasoning in real-world contexts. Students also reported high satisfaction with the learning process, particularly valuing the collaborative discussions and authentic content. These results support the effectiveness of the HIRCM-based package in promoting cognitive and moral development in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. The study offers practical implications for educators seeking to embed ethical and intercultural dimensions into language instruction, particularly in diverse or culturally sensitive classrooms.

Keywords: Critical Reading, Moral Reasoning, HIRCM Model, Hikmah Pedagogy, Multicultural Education



บทความวิจัย

โมเดล HIRCM: การยกระดับการอ่านอย่างมีวิจารณญาณและการคิดเชิงศีลธรรมในห้องเรียน
พหุวัฒนธรรมของภาคใต้ประเทศไทยซากีเราะห์ เจ๊ะเล็ม¹, มัฮซุม สาดิแม²¹นักศึกษาปริญญาโท สาขาวิชาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ คณะศึกษาศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยฟาฏอนี²ผศ. ดร. อาจารย์ประจำสาขาวิชาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ คณะศึกษาศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยฟาฏอนี

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บทคัดย่อ

ในโลกยุคข้อมูลข่าวสารปัจจุบัน นักเรียนต้องพัฒนาไม่เพียงแต่ทักษะการอ่านเพื่อความเข้าใจเท่านั้น แต่ยังรวมถึงทักษะการคิดเชิงวิพากษ์และการให้เหตุผลเชิงศีลธรรม เพื่อให้เป็นพลเมืองโลกที่มีความรู้และมีจริยธรรม งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อเสริมสร้างทักษะการอ่านเชิงวิพากษ์และการให้เหตุผลเชิงศีลธรรมของนักเรียนระดับมัธยมศึกษา ผ่านการพัฒนาและการนำชุดการเรียนรู้แบบโต้ตอบ HIRCM มาใช้ ซึ่งบูรณาการหลักการสอนของฮิกมะฮ์ การเรียนรู้แบบโต้ตอบ การสืบค้น การไตร่ตรอง และการอภิปรายเกี่ยวกับสถานการณ์ทางศีลธรรม ใช้การออกแบบการทดลองแบบกึ่งทดลองกลุ่มเดียว โดยมีการทดสอบก่อนและหลังการทดลองกับนักเรียนชั้น ม.2 จำนวน 14 คน ในโรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษาที่มีความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรมในจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ ของประเทศไทย เครื่องมือในการวิจัยประกอบด้วย ชุดสื่อการเรียนรู้ HIRCM แบบทดสอบวัดผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางการอ่านเชิงวิเคราะห์ แบบตรวจสอบการสังเกตการณ์ในห้องเรียน แบบสอบถามความพึงพอใจของนักเรียน และแบบสัมภาษณ์ปลายเปิด ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ชุดสื่อการเรียนรู้มีประสิทธิภาพเกินเกณฑ์มาตรฐาน 80/80 ($E1 = 82.14$, $E2 = 82.67$) และคะแนนสอบหลังเรียนของนักเรียนดีขึ้น อย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ เมื่อเทียบกับคะแนนสอบก่อนเรียน ($p < .05$) จากการสังเกตการณ์พบว่า นักเรียนแสดงให้เห็นถึงระดับการใช้เหตุผลเชิงศีลธรรมที่สูง รวมถึงความเห็นอกเห็นใจ ความยุติธรรม และความตระหนักรู้ทางวัฒนธรรม การวิเคราะห์เชิงกลุ่มจากความคิดเห็นของนักเรียน เน้นให้เห็นถึงพัฒนาการคิดเชิงวิเคราะห์ การเห็นคุณค่าของมุมมองพหุวัฒนธรรม และความสามารถในการประยุกต์ใช้เหตุผลในบริบทของโลกแห่งความเป็นจริง นักเรียนยังรายงานความพึงพอใจสูงต่อกระบวนการเรียนรู้ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งการให้คุณค่ากับการอภิปรายร่วมกันและเนื้อหาที่แท้จริง ผลลัพธ์เหล่านี้สนับสนุนประสิทธิภาพของชุดสื่อการสอนที่อิงตาม HIRCM ในการส่งเสริมพัฒนาการด้านสติปัญญาและคุณธรรมในบริบทการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ (EFL) งานวิจัยนี้เสนอข้อเสนอแนะที่เป็นประโยชน์สำหรับนักการศึกษาที่ต้องการบูรณาการมิติทางจริยธรรมและความเข้าใจระหว่างวัฒนธรรมเข้ากับการสอนภาษา โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในห้องเรียนที่มีความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรมหรือมีความอ่อนไหวทางวัฒนธรรม

คำสำคัญ: การอ่านเชิงวิพากษ์, การใช้เหตุผลทางศีลธรรม, โมเดล HIRCM, แนวทางการจัดการเรียนรู้เชิงปรัชญา, การศึกษาพหุวัฒนธรรม



Introduction

The 21st century demands that students develop not only language proficiency but also higher-order thinking skills, including critical analysis and ethical reasoning. In Thailand's multicultural southern border provinces, where cultural and religious diversity shapes everyday interactions fostering these competencies is especially crucial. Yet, English language instruction in Thailand has historically emphasized grammar and rote comprehension, often neglecting critical thinking and moral education.

Recent scholarship (Dishon & Gilead, 2020; Yoon, 2022) highlights the urgency of preparing learners for an unpredictable world through adaptive capacities, critical literacy, and moral reasoning. Despite these global imperatives, both international and national assessments consistently report underperformance among Thai students in reading. For instance, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 revealed that Thai students scored an average of 379 in reading significantly below the OECD average of 476 representing the country's lowest result to date. Similarly, the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) continues to reflect limited progress in reading comprehension and evaluative skills. These trends point to an urgent need for pedagogical reform that moves beyond memorization and embraces student-centered, reflective learning.

Although many studies in English language teaching have emphasized reading comprehension, few have systematically integrated critical thinking and moral reasoning. This gap is particularly evident in multicultural classrooms, where students encounter both linguistic and intercultural challenges. Traditional instruction often emphasizes literal and inferential comprehension while overlooking opportunities for higher-order thinking and ethical reflection. In Thailand, no research has applied Hikmah Pedagogy to English critical reading tasks, leaving a lack of studies that use multicultural texts to foster both analytical reading and moral reasoning.

To address this gap, the present study introduced the HIRCM model, an instructional framework that combines Hikmah Pedagogy with interactive learning strategies, reflection, and dilemma-based activities. Implemented with Grade 8 students in Thailand's southern border provinces, the model aims to enhance engagement with texts while cultivating critical reading, moral reasoning, and intercultural understanding through learner-centered, inquiry-based instruction.

Objectives of the Study

1. To develop an interactive learning package based on the HIRCM model aimed at enhancing lower secondary students' critical reading skills and moral reasoning for peaceful coexistence in the multicultural society of Thailand's southern border provinces.

2. To evaluate the efficiency of the developed learning package using the 80/80 criterion, with the expectation that at least 80% of students would achieve a minimum of 80% proficiency.
3. To assess the development of students' critical reading skills after participating in the HIRCM-based interactive learning activities.
4. To evaluate the students' moral reasoning skills in multicultural contexts.
5. To examine students' satisfaction with the learning experience provided by the HIRCM-based package.

Conceptual Framework for the HIRCM Interactive Learning Package on Critical Reading and Moral Reasoning Among Lower Secondary Students in a Multicultural Context of Southern Thailand

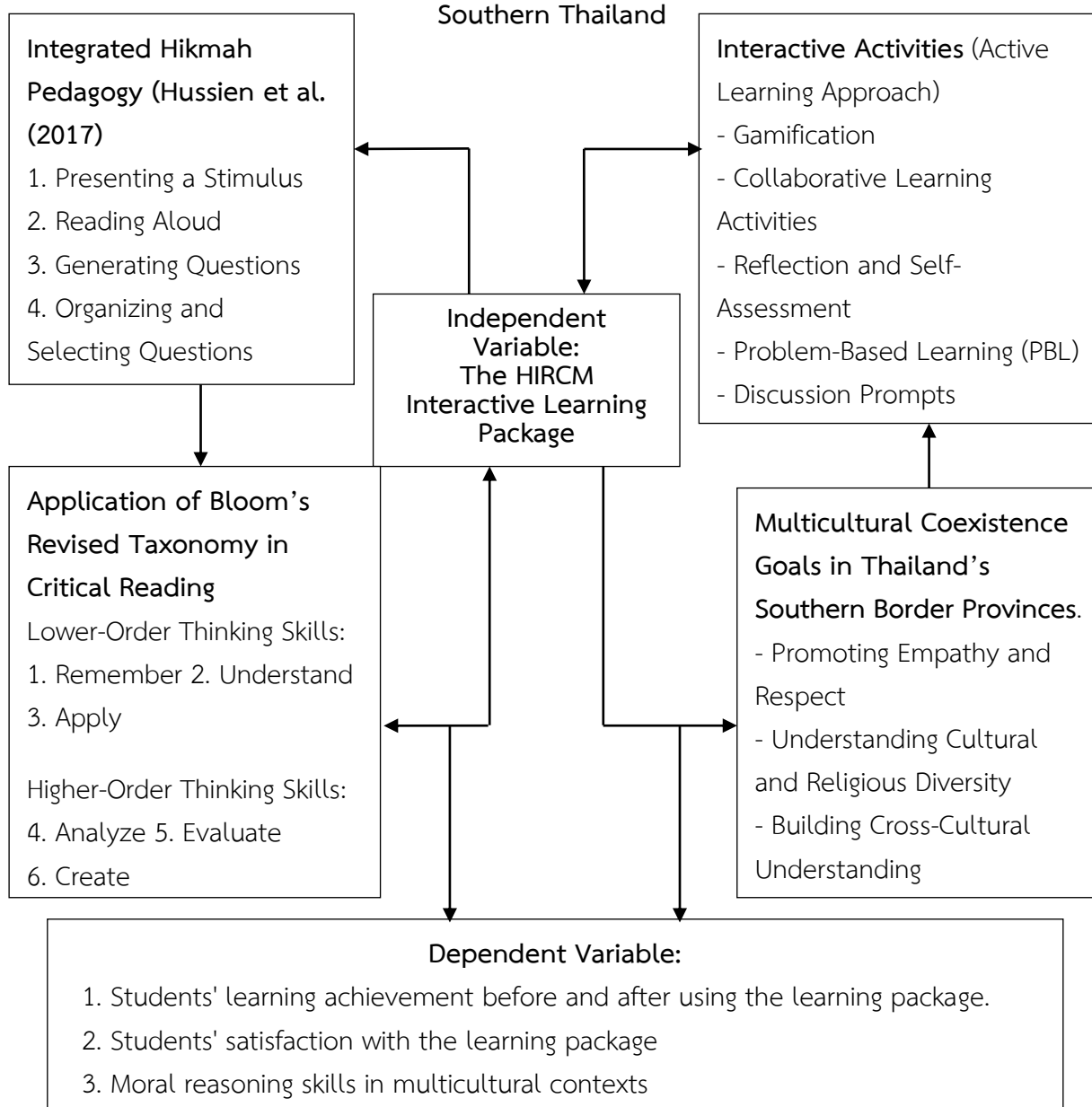


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework for the HIRCM Interactive Learning Package on Critical Reading and Moral Reasoning Among Lower Secondary Students in a Multicultural Context of Southern Thailand



Literature Review

Hikmah Pedagogy, introduced by Rosnani Hashim at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), is an adaptation of Philosophy for Children (P4C) contextualized within Islamic values (Zulkifli et al., 2020; Hussien et al., 2021). It integrates critical questioning, moral reasoning, and reflective dialogue within a Community of Inquiry and has been applied across subjects such as English, Islamic Studies, and Moral Education. Research confirms its effectiveness in enhancing reasoning, intercultural understanding, and collaborative dialogue (Hashim et al., 2021; Zulkifli & Hashim, 2022; Aiyetoro et al., 2024). Although rooted in Islam, its principles are adaptable to multicultural contexts. In southern Thailand, it was modified to embed Islamic perspectives in English texts while fostering empathy among Buddhist and Muslim students, making it a relevant foundation for the HIRCM model.

A multicultural classroom is a learning space where students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds study together. Such contexts require culturally responsive pedagogy that affirms identities and fosters dialogue (Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: A Systematic Overview, 2023; Afifuddin, 2025). In Thailand's southern border provinces, government schools often comprise a Thai Buddhist majority and a Muslim minority, creating authentic opportunities for intercultural engagement and for developing students' critical reading and moral reasoning.

The HIRCM model enhances students' cognitive and moral capacities through inquiry-based, student-centered learning, making it highly relevant in multicultural classrooms.

The acronym HIRCM stands for five interrelated components:

- **Hikmah Pedagogy:** Rooted in philosophical inquiry and ethical dialogue, this component encourages students to explore diverse viewpoints and engage in reflective discussion to develop moral awareness and reasoning.
- **Interactive Learning:** This element emphasizes active student participation through strategies such as gamification, group collaboration, peer dialogue, and project-based learning. These methods support engagement, motivation, and metacognitive growth.
- **Critical Thinking:** Learning activities in this component foster analytical skills by encouraging learners to interpret information, evaluate arguments, and apply logic to complex texts and issues.
- **Moral Reasoning:** Through moral dilemma analysis, reflective writing, and value-based discussions, students are guided to think ethically, appreciate multiple perspectives, and cultivate empathy in real-world and cross-cultural contexts.

The HIRCM model offers a holistic approach that blends cognitive development with ethical reflection. It equips learners not only to read critically but also to reason morally, preparing them to engage with complex social and cultural issues in a thoughtful, inclusive, and responsible manner.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine the effectiveness of the HIRCM interactive learning package in enhancing critical reading and moral reasoning among lower secondary students in a multicultural context. A quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design was conducted with 14 Grade 8 students. No control group was used; instead, students were assessed before and after the intervention to measure changes in their critical reading and moral reasoning skills, while student reflections and classroom observations provided data for qualitative analysis.

In terms of research ethics, the study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of Fatoni University. Written consent was also obtained from the school administrators, parents, and participating students prior to the implementation of the study.

2. Participants

The study was conducted at a government secondary school in Thailand's southern border provinces, where most students are Thai Buddhists and a minority are Muslims, reflecting the region's multicultural reality. This context was considered suitable for examining how the HIRCM model integrates critical reading and moral reasoning. Participants were 14 Grade 8 students (aged 13–14), an age group developmentally ready for higher-order thinking. One school was selected for reasons of feasibility, administrative support, and representativeness of the cultural composition common to government schools in the region.

3. Research Instruments

This study used six instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of the HIRCM package in developing critical reading and moral reasoning skills.

3.1 HIRCM Interactive Learning Package: Consisting of three thematic units (fitness, fashion, and food), each embedded with moral dilemmas and multicultural content to promote inquiry and reflective learning.

3.2 Lesson Plans: Designed based on Hikmah Pedagogy, the lesson plans incorporated four structured phases, pre-reading, while-reading, post-reading, and closing each with activities that fostered critical and moral reflection. In the pre-reading phase, pictures and guiding questions activated prior knowledge and encouraged reflective inquiry. The while-reading phase involved reading aloud, identifying main ideas, and generating questions to develop

comprehension and analytical skills. The post-reading phase focused on organizing questions, engaging in reflective dialogue (shura), and completing collaborative projects or role-plays to strengthen moral reasoning and apply lessons in real contexts. Finally, the closing phase included reflection circles and exit tickets to consolidate learning, foster introspection, and extend inquiry.

3.3 Critical Reading Achievement Test (Pre- and Post-test): A 30-item multiple-choice test was developed to assess students' critical reading skills, focusing on main ideas, inference, evaluation, and interpretation of multicultural texts. Content validity was confirmed through expert review with IOC values ≥ 0.50 , while pilot testing ensured clarity. Reliability analysis produced a KR-20 of 0.77, indicating acceptable consistency. The pre-test established baseline ability, and the post-test measured learning gains after the HIRCM package. This provided a systematic evaluation of students' progress in higher-order reading comprehension.

3.4 Observation Form (Checklist for Moral Reasoning in Multicultural Conversations): The observation form was developed to assess students' moral reasoning behaviors during classroom discussions and group activities. It focused on indicators such as respectful communication, logical reasoning, empathy, fairness, and intercultural understanding. The draft was validated by three experts in moral education, ELT, and multicultural studies, piloted with 39 non-sample students, and later refined before being applied to the sample group.

3.5 Open-Ended Written Interview Form: This tool consisted of eight guiding questions designed to elicit students' reflections on their learning experiences, moral reasoning, and development of critical reading skills. Questions encouraged personal insights, evaluation of activities, perceptions of multicultural coexistence, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. It was validated by experts, piloted with 39 students, revised, and finally administered to the sample group of 14 students.

3.6 Student Satisfaction Questionnaire: A 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire (5-point scale) measured students' satisfaction with the HIRCM package in terms of content, teaching methods, usefulness, and overall experience. The instrument demonstrated strong validity (IOC = 0.67–1.00) and internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$). It provided insights into learners' perceptions and acceptance of the instructional process.

4. Research Procedures and Data Collection

The study was conducted in nine sequential steps. First, permission was obtained from the school administration, and all research instruments were prepared. Pilot testing was conducted with non-sample students to ensure the validity and reliability of tools.

Next, a 30-item pre-test was administered to the sample group to assess their initial critical reading ability. The HIRCM Interactive Learning Package was then implemented over

17 instructional hours in a multicultural lower secondary classroom in southern Thailand, using lesson plans based on Hikmah Pedagogy. During the lessons, classroom observations were conducted to assess students' moral reasoning behaviors.

After the intervention, students completed the post-test, a satisfaction questionnaire, and a written interview with eight open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis to capture insights into students' critical reading and moral reasoning.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods.

Quantitative Analysis: Quantitative data from the Critical Reading Achievement Test (pre- and post-tests) and the Student Satisfaction Questionnaire were analyzed using mean, percentage, and standard deviation. The effectiveness of the HIRCM Interactive Learning Package was determined using the E1/E2 efficiency formula based on the 80/80 criterion. Satisfaction levels were interpreted using a 5-point Likert scale.

Qualitative Analysis: Qualitative data from the Observation Checklist for Moral Reasoning and Written Interview Form were analyzed through thematic analysis. Student reflections were categorized into key themes: learning experience, critical reading development, moral reasoning, and suggestions for improvement. Observational data were interpreted using performance-level rubrics focused on respectful dialogue, reasoning, and intercultural awareness.

6. Reporting and Interpretation of Data

Quantitative and qualitative analyses were used to assess the HIRCM package's impact. Pre- and post-test comparisons revealed improved critical reading performance, meeting the 80/80 efficiency criterion. Observation data showed strong student engagement in moral reasoning and intercultural dialogue.

Thematic analysis of student reflections highlighted enhanced comprehension, ethical awareness, and appreciation for collaborative learning. Satisfaction survey results indicated high levels of student approval regarding the content, teaching methods, and overall experience.

Results

1. Results on the Efficiency of the HIRCM Learning Package (80/80 Criterion)

The researcher analyzed the efficiency of the HIRCM Interactive Learning Package in enhancing critical reading and moral reasoning using the 80/80 standard criterion. The E1/E2 efficiency formula was applied, incorporating scores from during-learning activities (E1) and post-learning activities (E2). The results of the analysis are presented in **Table 1** below.



Table 1 Results of the Efficiency Analysis of the HIRCM Interactive Learning Package on Critical Reading and Moral Reasoning Among Lower Secondary Students in a Multicultural Context of Southern Thailand

Test Phase	N	Full Score	($\bar{X}$)	S.D.	Percentage (%)	Efficiency (E1/E2)
During Learning	14	30	24.64	0.93	82.14	82.14/82.67
After Learning	14	30	24.50	1.16	82.67	

As shown in **Table 1**, the HIRCM package achieved an efficiency score of 82.14/82.67, surpassing the standard criterion of 80/80. This result confirms the effectiveness of the learning package in enhancing students' critical reading and moral reasoning skills.

2. Development of Students' Critical Reading Achievement: Pre-test and Post-test Comparison

The researcher collected scores from the Critical Reading Achievement tests of 14 Grade 8 students, administered before and after the intervention. The pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed to verify the assumptions required for conducting a t-test. The results of the analysis are presented in **Table 2** below.

Test Phase	N	Full Score	($\bar{X}$)	S.D.	t
Before Learning (Pre-test)	14	30	14.07	2.13	18.57*
After Learning (Post-test)	14	30	24.50	1.16	

*Statistical Significance at the 0.05 Level

Table 2 presents a comparison of students' pre-test and post-test scores in critical reading. The mean score improved significantly from 14.07 (SD = 2.13) in the pre-test to 24.50 (SD = 1.16) in the post-test. A paired-sample t-test yielded a t-value of 18.57, which was statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. These findings confirm that the HIRCM package had a substantial positive impact on students' critical reading achievement.

3. Results of Students' Moral Reasoning in Multicultural Conversations

The researcher assessed students' moral reasoning through an observation checklist during classroom activities integrated into the HIRCM-based interactive learning package. The checklist focused on key behaviors, including respectful communication, logical justification of opinions, and openness to diverse perspectives. These observations captured how students engaged with moral and cultural issues in group discussions. The analysis results are presented in **Table 3** below.

Number of students	Quality Level			
	4	3	2	1
14	11	3	0	0
Percentage	78.57%	21.43%	0%	0%

Table 3 shows that 78.57% of students demonstrated an “Excellent” level of moral reasoning, while the remaining 21.43% were rated at the “Good” level. Notably, no students scored below these categories. These results indicate that the HIRCM-based interactive learning package was effective in fostering ethical reflection, respectful dialogue, and culturally sensitive communication among students in a multicultural classroom setting.

4. Students’ Satisfaction

The researcher evaluated students’ satisfaction with the HIRCM Interactive Learning Package using a structured satisfaction questionnaire and written interview forms to gain both quantitative and qualitative insights into students’ perceptions, learning experiences, and suggestions for improvement. **Table 4** presents the quantitative results from the satisfaction questionnaire.

Evaluation Items	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Satisfaction Level
1. I enjoyed and had fun learning with the interactive learning package.	4.71	0.47	Highest
2. I actively participated and engaged in analytical thinking throughout the learning activities.	4.78	0.57	Highest
3. I learned new English vocabulary, understood their meanings well, and applied them in daily life and understanding diverse cultures correctly.	4.92	0.26	Highest
4. I learned to read critically, understand different views, analyze info clearly, and apply it in daily life and exams.	4.71	0.46	Highest
5. I gained knowledge and critical reading skills that enable me to analyze information and provide effective reasoning before making decisions or using information.	4.42	0.75	High
6. The interactive package helped me understand content better and see diverse perspectives I can use in daily life.	4.57	0.51	Highest
7. I liked that the teacher provided immediate	4.64	0.63	Highest



Evaluation Items	($\bar{X}$)	S.D.	Satisfaction Level
feedback after using the learning package.			
8. I could better answer questions and clarify doubts for myself and peers through this method.	4.35	0.84	High
9. I was able to assess my own learning progress.	4.28	0.91	High
10. I would like the teacher to organize similar activities for English reading instruction.	4.71	0.61	Highest
Overall	4.61	0.60	Highest

Table 4 shows that students' overall satisfaction with the interactive learning package was at the highest level ($M = 4.61$, $S.D. = 0.60$). Most students expressed highly positive perceptions of the learning experience, particularly in areas such as engagement, active participation, vocabulary acquisition, and the development of critical reading skills. These findings suggest that the HIRCM-based learning package was not only effective in achieving its learning objectives but also well-received by students, significantly enhancing their motivation and overall academic outcomes.

5. Results from the Open-Ended Written Interview Form

To complement the quantitative findings, the researcher analyzed students' responses to open-ended reflection questions included in the Written Interview Form. This qualitative tool was designed to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and suggestions regarding the HIRCM Interactive Learning Package. The reflections provided deeper insights into how the learning package supported the development of critical reading skills, moral reasoning, and multicultural awareness. Thematic analysis of the responses revealed four key themes:

1. Learning Experience and Reading Comprehension Development

Most students reported that the HIRCM-based activities enhanced their reading comprehension and critical thinking abilities. They gained confidence in identifying main ideas, analyzing content, and summarizing information. Several students emphasized that the lessons encouraged them to express personal opinions, ask meaningful questions, and participate actively in discussions with peers. In addition, the vocabulary learning embedded in the texts supported better understanding of the materials. For example, one student reflected, *"Gained more analytical thinking skills because I had to read, summarize, and give my opinion."*

2. Moral Reasoning and Multicultural Awareness

The second major theme was the development of moral reasoning and intercultural sensitivity. Students noted that the lessons prompted them to think about fairness, responsibility, and respect in real-life situations. The multicultural scenarios presented in the reading texts helped them appreciate the values of different religions and cultural perspectives. As one

student wrote, “Helped me understand and appreciate the importance of different religions, supporting peaceful coexistence.” The learning environment fostered openness, respectful dialogue, and ethical reflection.

3. Benefits Gained from the Activities

Students expressed that the learning package provided them with practical thinking skills applicable to both academic and personal life. They appreciated the integration of moral and cultural content, as it made reading activities more meaningful and engaging. Several students mentioned that they became more thoughtful, careful in decision-making, and aware of real-world issues through the learning process. For instance, one student stated, “The advantage of the activity set is that it helps with analytical thinking.”

4. Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement

Despite overall positive feedback, students identified some areas for improvement. Common challenges included complex vocabulary, lengthy activities, and limited time for completion. To enhance the learning experience, students suggested simplifying difficult content, adding more interactive tasks such as games or debates, and adjusting the time allocation. Nevertheless, most students expressed a strong desire for the continued use of the HIRCM package in future lessons. One student concluded, “I want this learning package to continue because it’s fun and useful in multicultural life.”

These qualitative findings support the quantitative results and confirm the effectiveness of the HIRCM Interactive Learning Package in fostering not only critical reading and moral reasoning skills, but also student engagement, intercultural understanding, and reflective thinking in a multicultural EFL context.

Discussion

The research findings can be discussed according to the key issues that emerged from the study, as follows:

1. Development of the HIRCM-Based Interactive Learning Package

The results confirmed that the interactive English reading package, developed based on the HIRCM model, was of high quality and relevance for Grade 8 students in a multicultural context. Expert evaluations rated the package highly across all aspects ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 0.35$), validating its design alignment with curriculum standards and learner needs. This outcome reflects how culturally responsive teaching materials can meaningfully engage learners. Students’ reflections highlighted motivation, enjoyment, and deeper appreciation of diverse perspectives, showing that the package promoted both cognitive and emotional engagement. From Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, such engagement arises when learners interact with content that resonates with their lived experiences. Furthermore, embedding moral reasoning

supports findings that inquiry-based tasks foster empathy and ethical thinking (Lee, 2019; Sadruddin, 2022).

2. Evaluation of Instructional Efficiency (80/80 Criterion)

The HIRCM package achieved an efficiency score of 82.14/82.67, exceeding the 80/80 benchmark in Thai educational research. This suggests that the package not only covered learning content within the expected timeframe but also optimized instructional effectiveness. Similar results have been observed in prior studies, where reflective practices and inquiry-based approaches improved academic outcomes (Zulkifli & Hashim, 2019; Aiyetoro et al., 2024).

3. Improvement in Students' Critical Reading Skills

Post-test scores showed a statistically significant improvement ($t = 18.57$, $p < .05$), with all students demonstrating score gains averaging more than 10 points. Beyond the statistics, these improvements can be explained by the deliberate use of Bloom's higher-order thinking skills within the HIRCM model. Analysis was practiced through identifying author's intent and examining evidence in texts; evaluation was fostered through comparing perspectives and weighing arguments; and creation was encouraged via reflective writing and role-playing. These scaffolded tasks pushed students from literal comprehension toward critical literacy. Moreover, intercultural themes such as fitness, fashion, and food created authentic contexts for dialogue, encouraging learners to question assumptions and reflect on cultural values together. This combination of higher-order skills and intercultural dialogue explains why students' reading abilities advanced significantly.

4. Students' Moral Reasoning in Multicultural Conversations

Observation data revealed that 78.6% of students performed at the "Excellent" level and 21.4% at the "Good" level in moral reasoning. None scored below this range, underscoring the package's success in promoting respectful and reflective dialogue. These findings suggest that moral reasoning was not an incidental outcome but a product of structured inquiry and dialogue. Peer discussions around moral dilemmas gave students opportunities to articulate, defend, and reconsider diverse perspectives. Such dialogic exchanges mirror pathways toward principled moral reasoning (Zulkifli & Hashim, 2019; Suwannarat et al., 2023) and affirm that language learning can simultaneously cultivate ethical awareness (Bubnova & Strungar, 2023).

5. Student Satisfaction

The satisfaction survey ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.60$) showed the "Highest" level of student approval, particularly for the relevance of the texts and the interactive design. Students valued the integration of cultural and moral themes into reading tasks, which enhanced both motivation and personal connection to learning. This finding aligns with research showing that culturally relevant pedagogy fosters both academic success and emotional investment (Chiu et al., 2023; Bouloy, 2019).

6. Implications and Future Applications

The HIRCM model illustrates not only effectiveness but also mechanisms of change: reading comprehension was scaffolded into higher-order thinking, while intercultural dialogue provided the context for moral reasoning. This dual pathway explains the model's impact on both literacy and ethics. Beyond this study, the model has strong potential for scaling up. Its inquiry-based framework can be adapted into digital learning platforms to provide interactive modules, applied in teacher training to build facilitation skills in critical thinking, and integrated across subjects such as social studies or science to encourage ethical reflection and higher-order thinking. These extensions would broaden the model's impact and align it with current priorities for 21st-century skills (Chiu et al., 2023; Zulkifli & Hashim, 2019; Bubnova & Strungar, 2023).

Limitations of the Study

While this study demonstrates the effectiveness of the HIRCM package, several limitations must be noted. The small sample size ($n = 14$) from one classroom and the absence of a control group limit generalizability and causal inference. The five-week duration may not capture long-term growth in moral reasoning, while reliance on qualitative tools introduces potential bias. Future studies should involve larger and more diverse samples, use control groups, extend intervention periods, and apply triangulated assessments to strengthen validity.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the study's findings and limitations, the following recommendations aim to guide future research and improve educational practice.

1. Broader and Comparative Studies

Future research should include larger and more diverse samples across varied school settings to enhance generalizability. Using controlled experimental designs to compare the HIRCM package with conventional instruction would strengthen causal inferences. Extending implementation to urban, rural, and other multicultural contexts would also enable cross-cultural comparisons and deepen understanding of how philosophical inquiry functions in diverse educational environments.

2. Longitudinal Studies

Long-term studies are recommended to assess the sustained impact of Hikmah Pedagogy on students' cognitive and moral development. Tracking learners over an academic year or more could reveal whether gains in critical reading and ethical reasoning persist and translate into real-world applications, such as improved academic performance, civic engagement, or moral decision-making.

3. Cross-Curricular and Grade-Level Expansion

The HIRCM model should be tested beyond English language instruction, including disciplines such as social studies, science, and civics. Investigating its adaptability across educational levels from primary to upper secondary would inform how moral reasoning and philosophical inquiry can be scaffolded developmentally. Such cross-subject and cross-grade applications would support the cultivation of holistic, ethically grounded learners.

4. Broader Educational Outcomes

Research should also explore the HIRCM model's potential to foster 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, empathy, and creativity. Instruments like empathy scales or creativity rubrics could assess socio-emotional and cognitive growth. Moreover, examining its impact on learner motivation, autonomy, and self-reflection would offer a more comprehensive picture of the model's educational value. Demonstrating its alignment with national reform priorities and global competency frameworks would further support its widespread adoption.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that the HIRCM interactive learning package, grounded in Hikmah Pedagogy, effectively enhanced Grade 8 students' critical reading and moral reasoning skills in a multicultural EFL classroom. The integration of philosophical inquiry, student-centered activities, and moral dilemmas enabled learners to analyze texts more deeply, reflect on ethical issues, and appreciate diverse viewpoints.

The significant improvement in test scores, high observation ratings, and positive student feedback underscore the model's impact. More than a language tool, the HIRCM package became a platform for nurturing empathy, intercultural understanding, and reflective thinking-skills essential for responsible global citizenship.

This research contributes to ongoing educational reform in Thailand, offering a concrete model that aligns with national goals to foster holistic student development. It shows that moral and cognitive skills can be taught together through engaging and culturally relevant pedagogy.

As Thailand seeks to shape future-ready learners, the HIRCM approach offers a promising path forward. With further refinement and wider application, it holds potential to transform English classrooms into spaces of critical inquiry and moral growth.

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