

Developing a Policy-Oriented Educational Ecosystem: Mechanisms to Enhance Innovative Administration and Learning for Transformation in Private Islamic Schools in Pattani Province, Southern Thailand

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Abstract

This study aims to develop a policy-oriented collaborative educational ecosystem to enhance innovative administration and learning in private Islamic schools in Southern Thailand. The research has three objectives: (1) to analyze existing conditions and stakeholder expectations regarding collaborative mechanisms, (2) to design and develop a policy-oriented collaborative educational ecosystem, and (3) to examine its impact on educational quality enhancement. A qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach was employed, involving 175 stakeholders from 30 private Islamic schools in Pattani Province. Participants included school administrators, teachers, policymakers, community representatives, and private-sector stakeholders. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory workshops and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed three key outcomes. First, existing collaborative mechanisms were fragmented and characterized by a lack of shared vision, coordinated structures, effective communication, and sustainable support systems. Stakeholders expressed strong expectations for improving student learning outcomes, strengthening competency-based curricula, enhancing teacher capacity, and promoting learner-centered education. Second, a policy-oriented collaborative educational ecosystem was developed through the establishment of a multi-level mechanism, including a formally recognized subcommittee that strengthened coordination, collective

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action, and policy integration among stakeholders. Third, the mechanism demonstrated positive impacts on educational quality enhancement, particularly through improved management coordination and the advancement of learner-centered, competency-based teaching and learning practices. This study contributes a context-responsive, ecosystem-based framework that integrates governance, collaboration, and pedagogy, offering a scalable model for strengthening educational quality in private Islamic schools.

Introduction

Islamic education has consistently aimed to integrate the transmission of religious knowledge with the development of intellectual and social capacities, thereby nurturing learners who are both morally grounded and broadly competent (Moslimany et al., 2024; Narongraksakhet & Hayimasae, 2010). In the contemporary global educational landscape, increasing attention has been given to collaborative approaches, competency-based learning, and the transformation from teacher-centered to student-centered education, particularly in systems seeking to balance tradition and modernity. In this context, Islamic schools face the ongoing challenge of maintaining their faith-based identity while adapting to the demands of modern education systems (Taufikin et al., 2025). Within Thailand, private Islamic schools, historically referred to as pondok or madrasah, have served as vital institutions in the southern border provinces, simultaneously safeguarding religious tradition, providing formal education, and sustaining community life. These schools have gained strong support from parents and, in many areas, enroll a larger number of students than public schools. In their earliest forms, they functioned autonomously, focusing primarily on the transmission of Islamic teachings and the cultivation of students' moral character alongside essential religious knowledge (Lateh et al., 2025; Narongraksakhet & Hayimasae, 2010). These complex and evolving challenges call for a more integrated theoretical perspective to better understand and address the transformation of Islamic education systems.

To better understand and address these complex challenges, this study adopts a theoretical perspective that integrates ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2000), collaborative governance (Bryson et al., 2006), and contemporary perspectives on learning transformation and competency-based education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). From this perspective, education is understood not as a set of isolated institutional practices, but as an interconnected ecosystem in which multiple actors, structures, and cultural contexts interact dynamically to shape learning outcomes. This conceptualization is particularly relevant for complex educational settings such as private Islamic schools, where religious values, community expectations, and formal education systems must be balanced simultaneously. Accordingly, the challenges faced by these schools can be interpreted as systemic rather than isolated, requiring coordinated and context-responsive mechanisms across multiple levels of the educational ecosystem. In this regard, Islamic education can be viewed through a holistic lens that integrates intellectual (‘aql), moral (qalb), and social dimensions of human development (Assalihee, 2025; Gunawan & Lestari,

2021), reinforcing the need for collaborative and context-responsive mechanisms to support sustainable educational transformation.

Despite receiving strong community support, private Islamic schools have shown less encouraging academic outcomes. Results from the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) consistently indicate that their students perform below the national average and below those from other types of schools (National Institute of Educational Testing Service, 2025). In addition, by 2022 there were 159 private Islamic schools enrolling over 142,000 students, with Pattani Province accounting for the largest proportion, highlighting both their scale and strategic importance in the regional education system (Office of the Private Education Commission, 2023). Previous research identifies several factors contributing to this situation, including overloaded curricula due to the requirement to study both religious and general subjects (Attijani et al., 2025), limited professional training of many Islamic studies teachers who graduated abroad (Kuakul et al., 2021), weak administrative capacity among school leaders, inadequate resources, and student learning outcomes that do not align with local identities or learning needs (Aree & Rahman, 2016). Other obstacles include the ongoing security situation in the region and widespread poverty, both of which affect the stability and well-being of teachers and learners (Liow, 2009). Taken together, these issues reflect systemic constraints rather than isolated problems, indicating the need for integrated and collaborative solutions at multiple levels of the education system.

In spite of these challenges, the southern border provinces (Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat) also present significant opportunities through the Educational Innovation Area Act of 2019 (Royal Thai Government Gazette, 2019), which provides a policy framework for collaboration and reform. According to Section 5 of the Act, educational innovation areas are intended to develop innovations that improve student outcomes, reduce inequality, decentralize administrative authority, and strengthen collaboration among government agencies, local organizations, the private sector, and civil society. This policy context creates a unique opportunity to design and implement collaborative mechanisms that are both context-sensitive and scalable, particularly for private Islamic schools that require tailored support. With Pattani selected as a pilot province, the Act offers an enabling environment for experimentation and innovation aligned with local needs.

Although previous research has explored educational innovation in Pattani's innovation area, most studies have focused primarily on state schools. For example, Manyunu (2021) examined the Pattani Model aimed at strengthening the educational ecosystem in multicultural contexts, while Sungtong (2021) investigated collaborative mechanisms to drive innovation in school management and learning processes. These studies provide valuable insights into how innovation areas can foster new approaches to improve educational quality. However, their emphasis has largely been on public schools, even though the majority of students in Pattani are enrolled in private Islamic schools. More importantly, limited attention has been given to how collaborative mechanisms can be systematically designed, implemented, and evaluated to generate both administrative innovation and transformation in teaching and learning within

private Islamic schools. This represents a critical research gap, particularly in understanding how policy-oriented and ecosystem-based approaches can address complex, context-specific challenges in faith-based education systems.

To address these gaps, this study focuses on private Islamic schools in Pattani Province and adopts a participatory action research approach to engage stakeholders in analyzing conditions, co-designing collaborative mechanisms, and evaluating their outcomes and impacts. The study contributes by developing a policy-oriented educational ecosystem that links administration, learning innovation, and collaborative governance, with the aim of reducing teaching burden and enhancing student-centered learning. Beyond its local relevance, the study provides a scalable framework for integrating policy, practice, and community participation to support sustainable educational transformation in similar contexts.

Research Objective

1. To analyze the conditions and stakeholder expectations regarding the establishment of collaborative mechanisms in private Islamic schools in Pattani Province.
2. To design and develop collaborative mechanisms within a policy-oriented educational ecosystem to enhance innovative administration and learning management in private Islamic schools.
- 3 To evaluate the outcomes and impacts of the collaborative mechanisms on management innovation and learning transformation in private Islamic schools.

Literature Review

Educational Collaborative Mechanisms

Educational collaborative mechanisms refer to structured cooperation among multiple stakeholders to improve educational quality and ensure sustainability. The Office of the Education Council Secretariat (2020) defines them as coordinated processes among government, private sector, local authorities, and communities in jointly setting goals and strategies, consistent with the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (2015), which emphasizes integrated, multi-actor collaboration for lifelong learning and equity. At the operational level, collaboration involves shared responsibility, joint decision-making, knowledge exchange, and continuous engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Bryson et al., 2006). A holistic perspective is essential, recognizing the interdependence of educational, social, and contextual factors (Palma et al., 2011). In practice, collaboration engages teachers, administrators, policymakers, parents, and communities to enhance quality of life, socio-economic development, and participatory processes (Kaewthep, 2022). Effective collaboration further requires strategic partnership, including shared vision and alignment across sectors (Bryson et al., 2006). Complementing this, the concept of a learning ecosystem frames education as a dynamic system shaped by interactions among people, activities, environments, and coordinating structures (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). Together, these perspectives position collaborative mechanisms as systemic drivers integrating governance, practice, and learning within an educational ecosystem.

Administrative and Learning Management Innovations

Administrative innovation refers to new ideas or systems that enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of school management (Runcharoen, 2007; Suherman, 2025). In parallel, learning management innovation involves the systematic design of teaching and learning processes to improve educational quality and develop 21st-century competencies (Wongyai & Phatthaphon, 2019). These two dimensions are closely interrelated, as effective administration creates conditions for pedagogical innovation, while innovative learning practices reinforce management effectiveness. Recent shifts in education emphasize active and competency-based learning, including project-based and problem-based approaches that develop both knowledge and essential skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This transformation is further accelerated by digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, blended learning, and immersive environments (Fragkaki et al., 2020). Developing meaningful innovation requires systematic and iterative processes, beginning with needs assessment and goal setting, and supported by stakeholder participation (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Approaches such as design thinking enable problem-solving, prototyping, and testing (Panich, 2018), followed by evaluation and refinement through action research or R&D cycles. The sustainability of innovation depends on leadership, organizational culture, resources, and professional learning communities (De Medeiros et al., 2014). As well as alignment with policy and stakeholder engagement (Harris & Jones, 2017). Collectively, administrative and learning innovations function as interconnected processes that link governance and classroom practices to support sustainable learning transformation.

Private Islamic Schools

Private Islamic schools in Thailand, historically known as pondok or madrasah, have played a central role in preserving religion, education, and community life in the southern border provinces. Initially operating independently to transmit Islamic knowledge and cultivate moral character, these institutions were formally integrated into the national education system following policy reforms in the 1960s and the Private Schools Act of 1983, which introduced state recognition and financial support (Lateh et al., 2025; Narongraksakhet & Hayimasae, 2010). As a result, the sector has expanded significantly, with 159 schools enrolling over 142,000 students by 2022, particularly concentrated in Pattani Province (Office of the Private Education Commission, 2023).

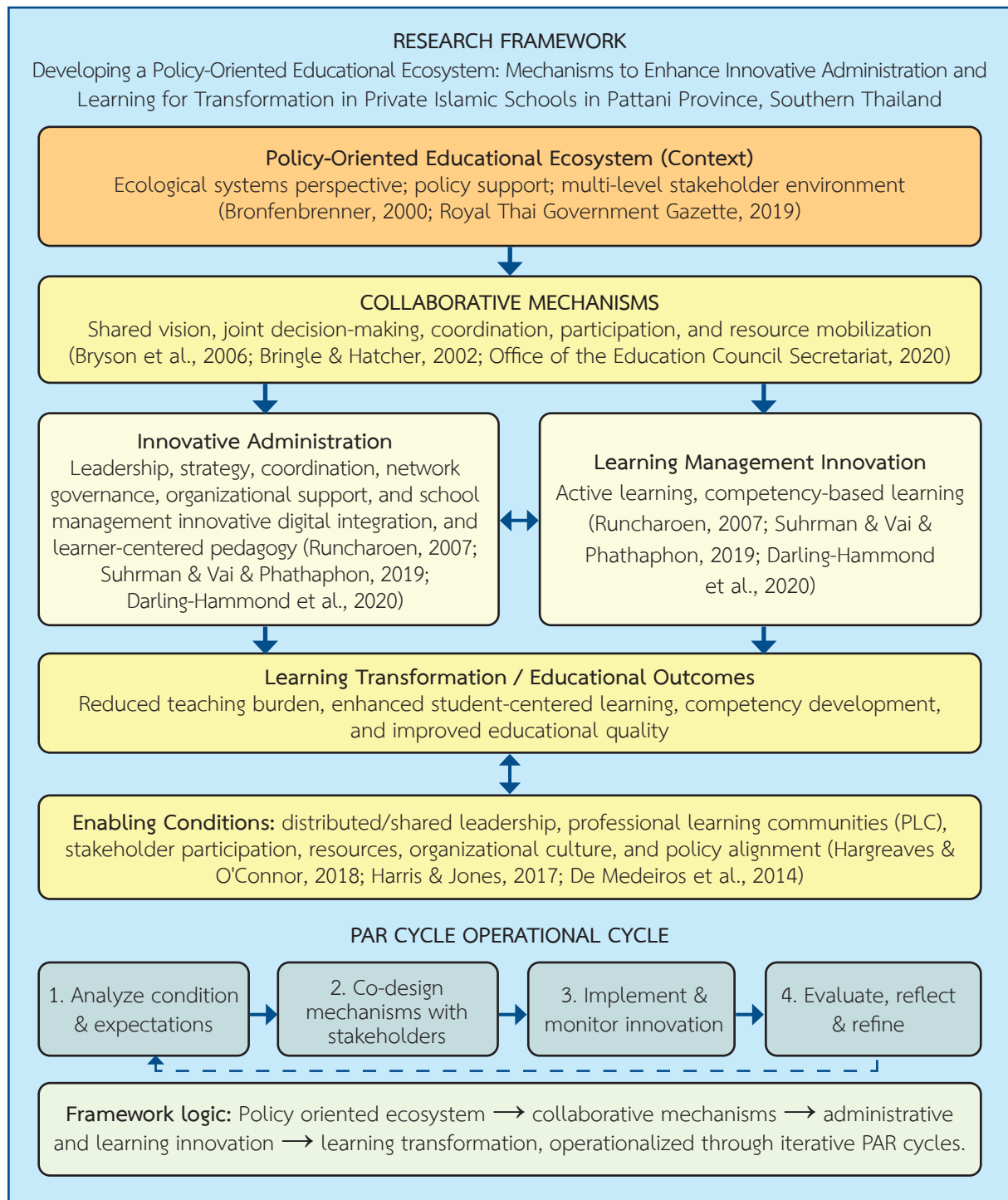
These schools implement a dual-curriculum model, combining the Basic Education Core Curriculum (2008) (B.E. 2551, in Thailand) and the Islamic Studies Curriculum (2003) (B.E. 2546, in Thailand), aiming to balance national standards with the preservation of Islamic knowledge (Assalihee, 2025; Baka, 2011). However, persistent challenges remain, including curriculum overload, limited integration of 21st-century competencies into Islamic studies, and constraints related to resources, teaching quality, and student engagement (Kuakul & Wae-useng, 2017; Raihani, 2017; Waehama et al., 2021). Addressing these challenges requires more than internal school improvement. It calls for collaborative mechanisms that connect schools with government agencies, communities, and other stakeholders to mobilize resources, strengthen professional capacity, and support sustainable reform. This context underscores the need for a policy-oriented

educational ecosystem that can bridge traditional Islamic education with contemporary learning transformation.

Research Framework

Figure 1

Research framework for developing a policy-oriented educational ecosystem through collaborative mechanisms in private islamic schools



This research framework conceptualizes private Islamic school development as a policy-oriented educational ecosystem shaped by multi-level interactions among policy actors, schools, communities, and other stakeholders, consistent with ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). Within this ecosystem, collaborative mechanisms function as the core driver that enables joint vision-setting, coordination, participation, and resource mobilization across sectors (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Bryson et al., 2006; Office of the Education Council Secretariat, 2020). These mechanisms support two interrelated domains of change: innovative administration, which strengthens leadership, strategic planning, and organizational support (Runcharoen, 2007; Suherman, 2025), and learning management innovation, which promotes active, competency-based, and learner-centered approaches enhanced by digital technologies (Wongyai & Phattthaphon, 2019; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Fragkaki et al., 2020). Together, these processes contribute to learning transformation, reflected in reduced teaching burden, enhanced student-centered learning, competency development, and improved educational quality. The framework is operationalized through an iterative participatory action research cycle (Kendon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007; McIntyre, 2007) of analysis, co-design, implementation, and evaluation/reflection, ensuring that the model accurately reflects the developmental and practice-based nature of the research.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Context

This study employs Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Kendon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007; McIntyre, 2007) as a systematic and iterative approach to generate contextually grounded and practice-oriented findings. The research is situated in Pattani Province, one of Thailand's pilot areas under the Educational Innovation Area Act, where private Islamic schools are numerous but continue to face limitations in establishing effective collaborative mechanisms. PAR is adopted because it emphasizes structured collaboration, critical reflection, and actionable change, which are essential for developing mechanisms that respond to the real needs of schools and communities. The study is conducted in two interconnected phases: the first involves analyzing conditions, stakeholder expectations, and key factors for establishing collaborative mechanisms through qualitative data collection, while the second focuses on the design, implementation, and evaluation of mechanisms through participatory workshops and expert consultations.

Participants in the PAR Process

In Participatory Action Research (PAR), the group of participants is not predetermined but shaped by the context and objectives of each stage of the study (Chevalier, 2019). PAR highlights the active role of stakeholders as co-researchers who contribute their knowledge, experience, and perspectives. Participation is therefore flexible and inclusive, ensuring that those most closely involved with the issue are engaged in decision-making and practical action. In this study, the main participants were stakeholders directly related to the development of private Islamic schools in Pattani Province. At the outset, the research team worked with ten officers from the Provincial Education Office to identify and select 30 schools of varying sizes across all 12 districts. To strengthen relationships and build mutual understanding, administrators and teachers from

these schools were invited, amounting to 175 participants. They were joined by the Governor of Pattani, the heads of the Provincial Education Office, the Office of Private Education, and the Provincial Administrative Organization, together with the director of the Islamic Sciences Demonstration School, the dean of the Faculty of Education at Fatoni University, and representatives from three civil society and private sector organizations.

As the study progressed, different groups became involved depending on the focus of each activity. For example, the second meeting engaged 175 stakeholders in reflecting on current conditions and expectations for collaborative mechanisms. The third meeting brought together 27 members of the Educational Innovation Area Committee, including teacher and administrator representatives, to discuss the research objectives and outline initial ideas. Smaller workshops with ten selected participants were then organized to draft a preliminary framework. Later, a subcommittee of 16 members was formally appointed by the provincial governor to serve as the core team for developing collaborative mechanisms. This subcommittee, along with school representatives, continued to meet in order to refine strategic plans and review progress. In addition, a group of 15 members from the provincial subcommittee for driving educational innovation were specifically involved in the evaluation stage to assess the outcomes and impacts of the developed mechanisms. Informal meetings were also conducted to maintain ongoing dialogue and responsiveness throughout the process. The flexible and multi-level participation in this project ensured that the findings were collaboratively constructed and grounded in the perspectives of those directly responsible for and affected by private Islamic school development.

Research Instruments, Data Collection and Analysis

To address Objective 1, data is collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. These instruments capture stakeholders' perspectives on current conditions of collaboration, their expectations for improvement, and internal and external factors influencing success. For Objective 2, participatory workshops are organized, bringing together representatives from schools, government agencies, and communities. During these workshops, participants co-design practical collaborative mechanisms, define roles and responsibilities, and identify operational procedures. Business Model Canvas (BMC) is used as a planning tool to help structure the mechanisms, covering value propositions, stakeholders, resources, and potential risks. For Objective 3, evaluation is conducted through focus group discussions with 15 members of the provincial subcommittee for driving educational innovation, aimed at assessing the outcomes and impacts of the developed mechanisms on administrative and learning innovation. All instruments are validated by three experts in educational administration, collaboration networks, and qualitative research to ensure content validity, relevance, and clarity.

Qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory workshops were analyzed using thematic analysis (Majumdar, 2019; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Coding was conducted both deductively, based on the research framework, and inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data. Themes were synthesized across schools and stakeholder groups to

identify common patterns as well as context-specific insights. To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation of sources and methods, member checking during workshops, peer debriefing within the research team, and audit trails documenting research decisions.

Table 1

Timeline with PAR framework.

No.	Activity	Date	Location / Details	PAR Step
1	Signing of cooperation (MOU) with network partners (9 agencies, 30 schools)	May 15, 2024	Islamic Science Demonstration School, PSU Pattani Campus	Step 1: Building relationships & shared understanding
2	Meeting to identify needs and expectations with administrators and teachers (30 schools)	May 15, 2024	Islamic Science Demonstration School, PSU Pattani Campus	Step 1: Building relationships & shared understanding
3	Meeting of the Educational Innovation Area Committee to present research issues on private Islamic schools	Jul 23, 2024	Pattani Provincial Education Office	Step 2: Joint design & planning
4	Agenda discussion on establishing a Subcommittee for the Development of Private Islamic Schools	Aug 28, 2024	Pattani Provincial Education Office	Step 2: Joint design & planning
5	Appointment of Subcommittee on the Development of Private Islamic Schools (16 members)	Oct 11, 2024	Office of the Governor of Pattani Province	Step 2: Joint design & planning
6	First meeting of the Subcommittee on the Development of Private Islamic Schools	Dec 26, 2024	Pattani Provincial Education Office	Step 3: Implementation & monitoring
7	Strategic planning workshop for subcommittee and stakeholders	Jan 28, 2025	Park Inn Town Pattani Hotel	Step 3: Implementation & monitoring
8	Follow-up meetings and coordination with Provincial Education Office, Private Education Commission, and network partners	2024–2025	Various locations	Step 4: Reflection, evaluation & improvement

Findings

The findings of this study are organized into three interconnected components as follows. First, the study examines the conditions and stakeholder expectations for collaborative mechanisms in private Islamic schools, highlighting systemic fragmentation alongside urgent priorities for reform. Second, it presents the development of a policy-oriented collaborative educational ecosystem as a structured mechanism to strengthen coordination and collective action. Third, it demonstrates the impacts of this mechanism on enhancing educational quality, particularly in advancing learner-centered practices and competency-based development, as presented in the following sections.

1. Conditions and Stakeholder Expectations for Collaborative Mechanisms in Private Islamic Schools

This study examines the existing conditions and stakeholder expectations regarding collaborative mechanisms in private Islamic schools in Pattani Province. The findings indicate that current mechanisms remain fragmented and do not yet function as strategic partnerships, reflecting systemic misalignment across actors, processes, and policy levels.

Four key limitations were identified. First, the absence of a shared vision and jointly defined goals leads to fragmented implementation and misaligned directions among stakeholders. As one Provincial Education Office officer noted, “we work together, but not toward the same direction” (Provincial Education Officer, PO1). Second, collaboration lacks systematic coordination, with no clear structure, core team, or defined roles, resulting in discontinuity and weak follow-up. A school administrator reflected that “there is no central unit that connects all actors together” (School Administrator, SA3). Third, communication remains limited, especially in conveying key priorities such as competency-based learning and learner-centered approaches. As a teacher explained, “many policies do not reach classroom practice clearly” (Teacher, T5). Fourth, resource and budget support are inconsistent, constraining implementation. A private sector representative emphasized that “collaboration cannot move forward without stable support” (Private Sector Representative, PS2).

From a holistic and ecosystem perspective, these issues reflect broader systemic gaps. In terms of goals, collaboration has not sufficiently focused on learner outcomes and competency-based development. In terms of scope, efforts remain narrowly academic, with limited integration of social and cultural contexts. In terms of participation, engagement is uneven, particularly among private sector and civil society actors. In terms of process, stakeholders are not consistently involved across key stages, including planning, implementation, and evaluation, limiting sustainability. From a learning ecosystem perspective, four gaps were identified. First, at the level of people, expertise exists but is weakly integrated across sectors. Second, at the level of activities, learning remains insufficiently aligned with competency-based and contextual needs. Third, at the level of learning spaces, opportunities for experiential and network-based learning are limited. Fourth, at the level of systems, the absence of a central coordinating mechanism weakens continuity and scalability.

In response, stakeholders expressed clear expectations for reform. Six high-priority expectations emerged: improving student outcomes through modern pedagogy and contextualized assessment; developing competency-based curricula integrating Islamic values and local culture; strengthening teacher professional development; shifting toward learner-centered learning; revising Islamic Studies curricula to align with contemporary contexts; and establishing a central coordinating body to integrate stakeholders and guide implementation. Three additional expectations support long-term sustainability: developing students' life and career competencies, enhancing leadership capacities of school administrators, and increasing flexibility in curriculum policy to allow contextual integration. As one policymaker stated, "we need a mechanism that connects policy, schools, and communities in one system" (Policy Actor, PA1).

Overall, the findings show that the challenges are systemic rather than isolated. At the same time, stakeholder expectations point toward a more integrated, ecosystem-based approach emphasizing shared vision, structured collaboration, and learner-centered transformation. These findings provide the foundation for developing the policy-oriented collaborative educational ecosystem presented in the following section.

2. Development of a Policy-Oriented Collaborative Educational Ecosystem

This section presents the findings related to Objective 2: the development of a policy-oriented collaborative educational ecosystem to support innovative administration and learning management in private Islamic schools. Building on the gaps identified in Section 4.1, the mechanism was developed through a participatory action research (PAR) process involving multi-sector stakeholders. The findings are organized into three components: (1) the structure of the mechanism, (2) its functional objectives, and (3) the core coordinating structure for implementation.

2.1 Structure of the Collaborative Mechanism

The findings reveal that the collaborative mechanism is structured as a multi-level educational ecosystem organized into five concentric layers, with learners positioned at the center as the primary focus of transformation. This structure reflects the principle that sustainable educational reform must be grounded in learner development while supported by interconnected systems of actors, resources, and governance.

At the core, learners are envisioned as developing integrated competencies across four domains: spiritual and moral responsibility, self-management and halal livelihood, active social engagement and environmental responsibility, and the pursuit of knowledge and technology grounded in Islamic values. These domains reflect a holistic conception of competency that integrates religious, personal, and societal dimensions.

The second layer consists of school-level actors, including teachers, administrators, parents, and peers. Teachers are repositioned from knowledge transmitters to facilitators of active and competency-based learning, while administrators play a strategic role in shaping vision, enabling innovation, and aligning institutional practices. Parents and peers contribute to reinforcing

learning through support and engagement in the immediate environment.

The third layer comprises close collaboration networks, such as school boards, alumni associations, community groups, and parent networks. These actors provide contextual support, legitimacy, and continuous feedback, strengthening the connection between schools and their communities. The fourth layer includes extended support and exchange networks, encompassing higher education institutions, private sector organizations, vocational and technical institutes, and international partners. These actors contribute knowledge, innovation, and resources, enabling schools to expand beyond traditional boundaries.

The outermost layer represents the policy and regulatory system, including the Provincial Educational Innovation Area Committee, government agencies, and higher education institutions. This level plays a critical role in policy alignment, regulatory flexibility, and resource mobilization. Together, these five interconnected layers form a systemic mechanism in which collaboration operates through co-development, cooperation and support, information exchange, and policy alignment, thereby addressing the structural limitations identified in Objective 1.

2.2 Functional Objectives of the Mechanism

The collaborative mechanism was designed with six interrelated objectives that directly respond to stakeholder expectations and systemic gaps. First, it aims to establish a learner-centered educational ecosystem that integrates contributions from multiple stakeholders across different levels. Second, it promotes innovative administration and learning management, particularly by reducing teaching overload and fostering active, technology-enhanced, and competency-based learning approaches. Third, the mechanism supports the development of 21st-century competencies that integrate Islamic values with academic and life skills. Fourth, it seeks to reduce educational inequality and improve the overall quality of private Islamic schools by providing coordinated support and shared resources. Fifth, it strengthens multi-sectoral participation, ensuring meaningful engagement from government agencies, educational institutions, religious organizations, and community actors. Finally, it emphasizes sustainability, through continuous monitoring, professional development of teachers and administrators, and the systematic dissemination of best practices. These objectives collectively position the mechanism not only as a coordination tool but as a strategic driver of educational transformation, particularly in shifting from teaching-centered practices toward learner-centered and competency-based development.

2.3 Coordinating Structure: The Subcommittee as a Strategic Mechanism

A key finding of this study is that the effectiveness of collaborative mechanisms depends on the presence of a formal coordinating structure. As a result, the research contributed to the establishment of a Core Team (Subcommittee) for the Development of Private Islamic Schools, operating under the Provincial Educational Innovation Area Committee. This subcommittee consists of 16 members representing schools, universities, religious organizations, and government agencies, ensuring balanced participation across sectors. It is chaired by a school leader, with a university academic serving as deputy chair, reflecting the integration of practice-based and

knowledge-based leadership. Supported by provincial authorities, including the governor, the subcommittee functions as the central mechanism for coordinating stakeholders, mobilizing resources, developing strategic plans, and monitoring implementation. Importantly, the subcommittee is formally recognized under the Educational Innovation Area Act (2019), providing legal legitimacy, structural stability, and continuity. This institutionalization addresses the previously identified gaps in coordination and sustainability, transforming collaboration from informal and fragmented practices into a structured and policy-supported mechanism capable of driving long-term educational innovation.

Figure 2

Policy-Oriented Collaborative Educational Ecosystem for Enhancing Innovation in Private Islamic Schools.



Developing a Policy-Oriented Collaborative Educational Ecosystem

- The model presents a multi-level collaborative ecosystem structured in five interconnected layers, with learners at the center as the focus of educational transformation.
- The second layer includes teachers, administrators, parents, and peers, engaging in co-development and learner-centered practices.
- The third layer consists of community-based networks (e.g., school boards, alumni, communities) that provide cooperation and contextual support.
- The fourth layer involves extended networks (e.g., universities, private sector, vocational and international partners) contributing through knowledge exchange and resource mobilization.
- The outermost layer represents the policy and governance system, ensuring coordination, regulatory support, and sustainability.
- Across all layers, collaboration operates through co-development, cooperation and support, information exchange, and policy alignment, forming a coherent mechanism for advancing competency-based and learner-centered education.

3. Impacts of the Collaborative Mechanism on Educational Quality Enhancement

The findings indicate that the policy-oriented collaborative educational ecosystem generated significant multi-level impacts on educational quality in private Islamic schools. A total of 1,280 individuals were developed, including 140 educational personnel, 1,000 students, and 140 knowledge multipliers, reflecting systemic capacity building across the ecosystem. Teachers demonstrated significant improvement in competency-based instruction and learner-centered

approaches, with mean scores increasing from moderate (2.91–3.22) to high levels (4.23–4.45), while administrators showed enhanced leadership capacity in instructional and coaching practices. At the classroom level, teaching practices shifted toward active, contextualized, and competency-based learning, resulting in statistically significant improvements in students' academic achievement and IMAN-Based Competencies (faith-based competencies grounded in Islamic principles), encompassing four domains: (I) Islamic relationship with Allah and the Prophet, (M) management of self, family, and halal career, (A) active social engagement and environmental responsibility, and (N) knowledge, technology, and innovation grounded in faith. Students also demonstrated improved English communication skills alongside stronger cultural identity and positive learning attitudes. At the organizational level, all 30 schools showed strengthened collaboration, innovation, and integration of Islamic values, supported by the emergence of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). At the policy level, the formal establishment of the Subcommittee for the Development of Private Islamic Schools under the Pattani Educational Innovation Area recognized as the only subcommittee of its kind in Thailand established under the Educational Innovation Area Act (2019) institutionalized the collaborative mechanism, ensuring coordinated governance, resource mobilization, and long-term continuity.

Discussion

The findings on the conditions and stakeholder expectations for collaborative mechanisms highlight that the challenges faced by private Islamic schools are systemic rather than isolated. The absence of a shared vision, fragmented coordination, limited stakeholder engagement, and weak process continuity reflect misalignment across multiple levels of the educational system. This pattern is consistent with ecological systems theory, which emphasizes that educational outcomes are shaped by interactions among interconnected layers of actors and contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). This addresses a gap where prior studies have often examined collaboration at institutional or program levels but have not sufficiently explained how multi-level misalignment across goals, participation, and processes constrain systemic educational transformation. These findings therefore extend existing perspectives by demonstrating that effective collaboration requires alignment not only in structure but also in vision, participation, and operational processes within a broader educational ecosystem.

Importantly, the findings on stakeholders' expectations provide further insight into the direction of educational transformation. The strong emphasis on competency-based curricula, learner-centered pedagogy, and integrated Islamic values reflects a shift toward more holistic and context-responsive models of education. This aligns with global frameworks that highlight the importance of integrating cognitive, social, and ethical dimensions of learning (UNESCO, 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), as well as studies in Islamic education that emphasize the integration of faith, identity, and modern competencies (Raihani, 2017; Waehama et al., 2021). At the same time, these expectations reveal a critical tension between policy aspirations and existing institutional capacity. While stakeholders articulate clear and progressive directions,

the current system remains constrained by structural limitations, suggesting that expectations function not only as desired outcomes but also as indicators of systemic gaps that require coordinated intervention.

This is consistent with prior research emphasizing that complex educational challenges require coordinated, context-responsive mechanisms rather than fragmented interventions (Bryson et al., 2006; UNESCO, 2015; Office of the Education Council Secretariat, 2020). From a holistic perspective, these findings reinforce the view that educational problems are embedded within interconnected social and organizational systems (Palma et al., 2011; Kaewthep, 2022). However, the persistence of fragmentation also suggests that collaboration is not merely a structural or technical issue but a cultural and organizational challenge. Entrenched practices, power relations, and institutional routines may resist systemic change, indicating that transformation requires shifts in both organizational culture and stakeholder mindsets, not only structural redesign.

In response, the development of a policy-oriented collaborative educational ecosystem translates these theoretical insights into a structured, multi-layer mechanism integrating governance, learning processes, and community engagement. The five-layer ecosystem reflects principles from ecological systems theory and collaborative governance, highlighting the importance of coordinated action across multiple actors and levels (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Bryson et al., 2006), while also aligning with the learning ecosystem perspective that emphasizes the mobilization of diverse stakeholders for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). Nevertheless, despite its structural coherence, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of such mechanisms remains contingent upon sustained stakeholder commitment, leadership continuity, and institutional alignment. This suggests that formal structures alone are insufficient; long-term stability requires adaptive governance, distributed leadership, and continuous engagement, particularly in contexts characterized by administrative turnover and socio-political uncertainty.

At the pedagogical level, the observed shift toward learner-centered and competency-based practices supports contemporary theories of educational transformation and 21st-century learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Panich, 2018). The integration of IMAN-Based Competencies further extends this perspective by demonstrating how faith-based values can be systematically aligned with competency-based education in a contextually meaningful way. However, the findings also reveal uneven implementation, with some schools adopting surface-level adaptations rather than deep pedagogical transformation. This highlights a critical gap between policy intention and classroom practice, indicating that pedagogical change requires sustained professional development, coaching systems, and context-specific support to achieve depth and consistency across schools.

Furthermore, the emergence of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and strengthened collaboration among stakeholders reinforces the argument that sustainable innovation depends on collective capacity and continuous professional learning (De Medeiros et al., 2014; Bringle

& Hatcher, 2002). At the same time, participation across sectors remains uneven, particularly in engaging private sector and civil society actors. This reflects a structural limitation of collaborative mechanisms, where certain stakeholders remain peripheral rather than fully integrated. Strengthening cross-sector engagement, therefore, is not only a matter of inclusion but also a critical condition for enhancing resource mobilization, innovation capacity, and long-term sustainability.

At the policy level, the findings highlight the enabling role of frameworks such as the Educational Innovation Area Act (2019), which support systemic reform through decentralized and context-responsive approaches (Office of the Education Council Secretariat, 2020). The integration of participatory action research (PAR) with policy-driven mechanisms demonstrates the value of combining bottom-up participation with top-down support (Kindon et al., 2007; McIntyre, 2007). However, reliance on policy frameworks also introduces structural dependency, where sustainability may be affected by changes in funding, regulations, or political priorities. This underscores the importance of developing internal capacities and self-sustaining mechanisms within schools and networks to ensure long-term resilience.

This study contributes to the literature by advancing a policy-oriented collaborative educational ecosystem that integrates ecological systems theory, collaborative governance, and faith-based competency development within private Islamic schools. It presents an empirically grounded model that systematically aligns policy, pedagogy, and cultural-religious dimensions within a unified ecosystem, extending prior studies that often address these elements in isolation. The findings also offer international relevance for faith-based and culturally diverse education systems seeking to balance identity, quality, and global competencies through ecosystem-based reform. At the macro-policy level, the study highlights the importance of embedding collaborative ecosystem mechanisms within national education strategies to enhance scalability, coordination, and long-term sustainability.

Conclusion and Implication

This study examined the conditions, stakeholder expectations, and the development of collaborative mechanisms for private Islamic schools in Pattani Province. The findings reveal fragmented systems characterized by the absence of a shared vision, weak coordination, limited communication, and insufficient support. Stakeholders emphasized urgent priorities, including improving student achievement, strengthening competency-based curricula, enhancing teacher development, and shifting toward learner-centered education. In response, a legally recognized subcommittee was established under the Provincial Educational Innovation Area Committee, marking a critical step toward more structured and sustainable collaboration. However, the findings suggest that effective collaboration extends beyond formal structures, requiring strengthened governance, active network management, and pedagogical transformation. While the subcommittee provides a platform for multi-sector engagement, its long-term effectiveness depends on sustained participation, policy continuity, and stronger integration with communities

and the private sector. These findings reinforce the importance of multi-level collaboration and ecosystem-based approaches. Practically, they highlight the need for policy support tailored to private Islamic schools and for capacity building in teacher development, technology integration, and participatory learning. Collaborative mechanisms thus function both as a governance tool and as a driver of learning transformation, enabling private Islamic schools to remain competitive, contextually relevant, and grounded in Islamic values. Future research should examine the scalability of this model across different provinces, conduct comparative studies in diverse socio-cultural contexts, and explore the integration of digital innovation and international collaboration to further strengthen ecosystem-based educational transformation.

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Ethical Approval

The study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee for Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus (REC Number: psu.pn.2-085/67).

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