



ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Policy to Classroom: A Strategic Approach to Scaling Skills-Based Learning in Secondary Education

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Correspondence: zainalarifin@gmail.com**Article History:** Received: 12 Oct 2025 • Revised: 05 Dec 2025 • Accepted: 15 Jan 2026 • Published Online: 31 Jan 2026**Abstract**

The global shift toward skills-based education necessitates a profound transformation in school-level strategic management to ensure successful curriculum implementation. This study investigates how Tanyong Mas School in Narathiwat, Thailand, bridges the gap between educational policy and classroom practice through a strategic institutional framework. Utilizing a qualitative case study methodology, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and comprehensive document analysis involving principals, educators, and students. The research identifies that school leadership effectively facilitates pedagogical innovation by integrating 21st-century competencies into diverse subjects, including religious and cultural curricula. The findings demonstrate that success in scaling skills-based learning is driven by a systematic alignment of strategic planning, teacher professional agency, and the contextualization of instructional design to meet evolving learner needs. Furthermore, the study reveals that leadership commitment to fostering an adaptable ecosystem is critical for overcoming systemic challenges in curriculum modernization. The results imply that institutional leaders must act as instructional architects, shifting from top-down administration to a decentralized, inquiry-based approach that empowers teachers to innovate. Ultimately, this research provides a scalable framework for secondary institutions aiming to enhance student workforce readiness while maintaining academic integrity in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The global educational paradigm is currently undergoing a massive shift toward skills-based learning in response to the demands of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0. Globally, secondary education institutions are no longer merely required to transfer theoretical knowledge; they must also equip students with practical competencies relevant to future labor market needs (Dede & Richards, 2020; Kivunja, 2021). The significance of this transition is evident in the efforts of various nations to overhaul national curricula to integrate digital literacy, complex problem-solving, and creativity

([Lucas, 2022](#); [UNESCO, 2021](#)). In Thailand, the "Thailand 4.0" policy serves as a primary driver for transforming secondary school curricula to produce an innovative and competitive workforce ([Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2021](#); [Sriarunrasmee et al., 2023](#)). Consequently, strategic management at the school level has become a crucial instrument in ensuring that global policy visions are successfully internalized within daily classroom instructional activities.

However, the transition toward skills-based learning faces systemic challenges that often hinder field effectiveness. A fundamental issue arises from the unreadiness of the infrastructure and a gap in teachers' competency in translating macro policies into practical instructional modules ([Hodge et al., 2020](#); [Sailer & Homner, 2020](#)). These challenges are further complicated by cultural resistance and rigid school bureaucracies, particularly in regions with strong socio-religious characteristics, such as Southern Thailand ([Arphattananon, 2021](#); [Pitsuwan, 2022](#)). The misalignment between modern curriculum demands and traditional teaching methods creates significant barriers to the scalability of educational innovation ([Kaur & Singh, 2023](#); [World Bank, 2022](#)). As a result, many educational institutions become trapped in administrative formalities, failing to achieve the pedagogical change industry stakeholders expect.

Previous research on curriculum management and skills-based learning has been extensive in mapping these changing dynamics. Hodge et al. (2020) conducted research on competency-based curriculum effectiveness, focusing on TVET frameworks; however, this study is criticized for being overly technical and failing to consider general secondary school management dynamics. Furthermore, research on instructional leadership by [Gumus et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Hallinger et al. \(2022\)](#) outlines the role of principals, yet these studies lack practical models for schools in marginal or conflict-affected areas. Digital adaptation research by [Sailer and Homner \(2020\)](#) and [Lucas \(2022\)](#) examines technology use but fails to address the integration of local and religious values in skill materials. Meanwhile, studies by [Nomnian and Arphattananon \(2021\)](#) and [Sriarunrasmee et al. \(2023\)](#) explore Thailand 4.0 policies but fail to examine how specific strategies are applied at the operational classroom level in border schools with unique cultural diversity.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrated approach that bridges strategic educational management with micro-scale classroom practices in the border regions of Southern Thailand, specifically at Tanyong Mas School. Unlike previous studies that separate policy analysis from pedagogical practice, this study offers a holistic analysis of how national policies are "scaled" through adaptive instructional leadership. Another novelty is the focus on integrating 21st-century skills into non-technical subjects, including Qur'anic studies and the Malay language, which is rarely explored in secular educational management literature ([Arphattananon, 2021](#); [Pitsuwan, 2022](#)). By exploring the synergy between religious values and professional skills, this research provides a new contribution to an inclusive Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) model. This makes the study a vital reference for designing instructional management that is not only technically modern but also socio-culturally relevant.

There is a distinct research gap between central policy expectations and the realities of management in rural and border secondary schools. Most current literature focuses on urban areas or international schools with abundant resources ([Hallinger et al., 2022](#); [Kivunja, 2021](#)). There is a significant scarcity of studies that specifically detail the "strategic approach" required to scale skills-based learning in secondary schools facing resource constraints and a dual-curriculum burden (religious and academic). The fundamental difference between this research and previous studies is its unit of analysis, which combines the principal's managerial perspective with the teacher's instructional agency within a community-based school context in Narathiwat. This gap must be closed to provide guidance for similar schools in managing change without sacrificing their institutional identity.

The theoretical framework used in this research is based on Strategic Educational Management Theory combined with the concept of Instructional Leadership by Hallinger and Murphy. Strategic management theory allows the researcher to dissect the processes of curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation systemically ([Kotter, 2020](#); [Wheelen et al., 2023](#)). Meanwhile, instructional leadership theory provides a lens to observe how principals influence teacher behavior and the learning climate to align with student skill targets ([Gumus et al., 2021](#); [Hallinger et al., 2022](#)). The integration of these two theories is highly relevant for analyzing school transformation from a bureaucratic organization into a dynamic learning organization. Through this framework, school strategy effectiveness can be measured more accurately by simultaneously assessing both managerial parameters and pedagogical achievements.

The concepts utilized in this research include Scaling-Up Innovation, Skills-Based Learning (SBL), and Contextualized Pedagogy. The concept of scaling-up refers to institutional efforts to expand the reach of learning innovation from a small unit to the entire school ecosystem sustainably ([Dede & Richards, 2020](#); [Lucas, 2022](#)). Skills-Based Learning is used as a competency parameter encompassing 21st-century literacy, numeracy, and character ([Kivunja, 2021](#); [UNESCO, 2021](#)). Finally, the concept of Contextualized Pedagogy emphasizes the importance of tailoring teaching methods to students' cultural backgrounds and local needs to make learning more meaningful ([Arphattananon, 2021](#); [Sriarunrasmee et al., 2023](#)). These three concepts interact to form a flexible management model oriented toward tangible student outcomes.

This research is particularly compelling because its locus, Tanyong Mas School in Narathiwat, is situated in the heart of the Southern Thailand border region with complex socio-political dynamics. Interestingly, this school has made a strategic leap in adopting skills-based learning despite security challenges and economic constraints in the area ([Arphattananon, 2021](#); [Pitsuwan, 2022](#)). The phenomenon of how religious subjects like the Qur'an can be integrated with listening methods and 21st-century skills represents a positive anomaly in instructional practice that warrants documentation. The school's success in scaling this innovation provides empirical evidence that proper management can overcome even the most severe environmental barriers. Therefore, it is essential to study this strategy so it can be replicated by other educational institutions facing similar challenges worldwide.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze and describe the strategic approach implemented by Tanyong Mas School in scaling skills-based learning at the secondary education level. Specifically, the study aims to uncover the role of instructional leadership in mobilizing school resources and facilitating teacher pedagogical transformation ([Gumus et al., 2021](#); [Hallinger et al., 2022](#)). Furthermore, this research seeks to evaluate how the integration of academic and skills curricula is managed to create a sustainable learning ecosystem ([Kivunja, 2021](#); [Sriarunrasmee et al., 2023](#)). The final results of this research are expected to formulate a strategic management model that can serve as a guide for policymakers and educational practitioners in implementing skills-based curricula effectively and contextually. Thus, this objective directly addresses current global educational challenges through a tested local solution.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The methodological framework of this study is designed to capture the complex interplay between strategic management and classroom-level pedagogical shifts. To ensure a robust investigation into how skills-based learning is scaled within a secondary institution, this research employs a systematic qualitative approach. This section outlines the structural journey from the initial design to the final validation of findings, providing a clear roadmap of the scientific rigor applied at Tanyong Mas School.

2.1 Research Design

The research design serves as the foundational blueprint for investigating the scaling of skills-based learning within its natural institutional setting. This study employs a qualitative case study approach, which is particularly suited to exploring "how" and "why" questions in a real-life context where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident ([Miles et al., 2020](#); [Yin, 2023](#)). By focusing on a single instrumental case at Tanyong Mas School, the researcher can perform an in-depth exploration of the strategic mechanisms and leadership behaviors that drive curriculum transformation. This design enables the collection of rich, detailed descriptions of the school's ecosystem, ensuring that the unique socio-religious nuances of Narathiwat are integrated into the analysis. To clarify the logical flow of this study, the relationship between research questions and analytical methods is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Research Questions and Types of Analysis

No	Research Question	Type of Analysis
RQ1	How does the leadership at Tanyong Mas School translate national skills-based policies into institutional strategy?	Strategic Alignment Analysis & Pattern Matching
RQ2	What specific pedagogical strategies are used to scale 21st-century skills across academic and religious subjects?	Content Analysis & Constant Comparative Method
RQ3	What are the challenges and enablers in the scaling process within the border region context?	Thematic Analysis & Contextual Mapping

The systematic execution of this research follows a structured sequence of phases. Before proceeding to the data collection phase, it is essential to visualize the methodology's operational workflow.

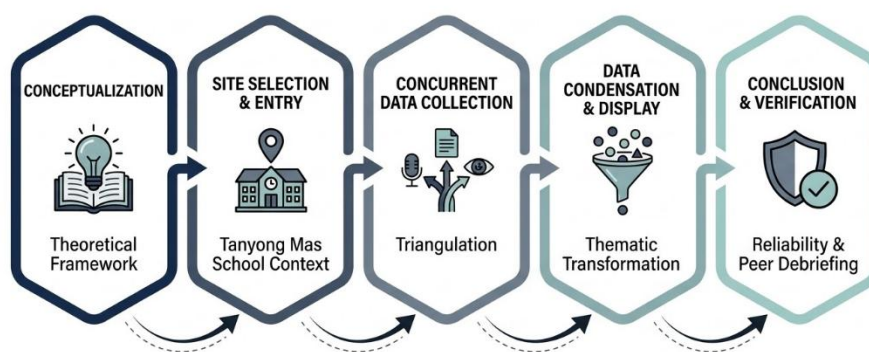


Figure 1. Research Methodology Process Flow

Figure 1 illustrates the linear and iterative phases of the research methodology, starting from the identification of the case to the final synthesis of results. The process begins with (1) Conceptualization, where the theoretical framework and research gaps are identified. It then moves to (2) Site Selection and Entry, focusing on the unique context of Tanyong Mas School. The third phase is (3) Concurrent Data Collection, utilizing multiple sources for triangulation. This is followed by (4) Data Condensation and Display, where raw data is transformed into manageable themes. Finally, the process concludes with (5) Conclusion Drawing and Verification, ensuring the reliability of the findings through member checking and peer debriefing ([Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#); [Nowell et al., 2020](#)).

2.2 Data Collection

Following the established process flow, the data collection phase was conducted to gather empirical evidence from diverse stakeholders. This study employed a triangulation of data sources, including in-depth interviews, participant observations, and comprehensive document analysis ([Creswell & Poth, 2023](#); [Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2021](#)). Interviews were conducted with school leaders and teachers to capture the "will" and "capacity" behind policy implementation, while classroom observations focused on the "scaling" of skills-based methods in subjects such as Al-Qur'an and Malay Listening. Document analysis involved reviewing school strategic plans, lesson modules, and student portfolios to verify the alignment between spoken strategy and written practice. This multi-method approach ensures that the data is not only deep but also verified across the institution's operational layers.

2.3 Data Analysis

Once the data were gathered, they underwent a rigorous analytical process to transform raw information into meaningful insights. This study utilizes the interactive model of data analysis, which involves three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification ([Miles et al., 2020](#); [Saldaña, 2021](#)).

The analysis began with "First-Cycle Coding" to identify initial patterns in leadership behavior and pedagogical innovation. Subsequently, "Second-Cycle Coding" or pattern coding was applied to group these initial codes into broader themes such as "Instructional Architecture" and "Cultural Contextualization." To maintain objectivity, the researcher used NVivo software to manage and visualize relationships among categories. This systematic coding process ensures that the conclusions drawn are firmly grounded in the empirical data collected from Tanyong Mas School.

2.4 Research Instruments

The precision of the data analysis depends heavily on the quality of the instruments used during the collection phase. The primary instrument in this qualitative study is the researcher themselves, supported by interview protocols, observation checklists, and document review guides. These instruments were developed based on the indicators of Strategic Educational Management and Skills-Based Learning as defined in the theoretical framework. Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the research instruments and the indicators they measure.

Table 2. Research Instrument Matrix and Indicators

Instrument	Subject/Source	No. of Items/Focus	Key Indicators
Interview Guide	Principal & Vice Principals	12 Items	Strategic Planning, Vision Communication, Resource Allocation
Interview Guide	Subject Teachers	10 Items	Pedagogical Innovation, 21st-century Skills Integration
Observation Checklist	Classroom Activities	8 Domains	Student Engagement, Inquiry-based Learning, Skill Application
Document Guide	Official School Files	5 Categories	Curriculum Mapping, Evaluation Reports, Lesson Plans

Table 2: The matrix above outlines the distribution of research focus across different stakeholders and tools. The interview guides were designed to elicit narratives about the strategic shift, while the observation checklist provides objective evidence of classroom implementation ([Hallinger et al., 2022](#); [Kivunja, 2021](#)).

2.5 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the scientific integrity of the findings derived from these instruments, the study adhered to strict criteria for qualitative validity and reliability, often referred to as trustworthiness. This research implemented four main strategies: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability ([Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#); [Nowell et al., 2020](#)). Credibility was established through prolonged engagement at the research site and persistent observation of the scaling process. Transferability was ensured by providing "thick descriptions" of the Southern Thailand context, enabling other researchers to assess the model's applicability to their own settings. Dependability was maintained through an inquiry audit, where the research process and documentation were reviewed for consistency. Finally, confirmability was achieved by ensuring that the findings were clearly derived from the data through an audit trail and member checking with participants.

2.6 Research Subjects and Location

The effectiveness of these validity measures is deeply tied to the specific subjects and location chosen for the study. The research was conducted at Tanyong Mas School, located in the Rangae District of Narathiwat Province, Thailand. This location was purposively selected because it is a leading institution in the border region that successfully balances secular and religious curricula amid socio-political complexities (Arphattananon, 2021; Pitsuwan, 2022). The study included the principal, vice-principals of academic affairs, and a purposive sample of 12 teachers across various departments, including STEM and Humanities/Religious Studies. Additionally, students were observed to gauge the impact of the skills-based transition on their learning outcomes.



Figure 2. Subject and Site Selection Logic

Figure 2 displays the hierarchy of participants within the institutional context of Tanyong Mas School. The subjects are divided into three tiers: Tier 1 (Strategic), involving top leadership; Tier 2 (Instructional), involving the teachers as the "scaling agents"; and Tier 3 (Experiential), involving the students as the beneficiaries of the skills-based transition. This tiered selection ensures that data is collected from both the "top-down" policy perspective and the "bottom-up" classroom experience (Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2021; Wheelen et al., 2023).

2.7 Ethical Considerations

In addition to the structural components above, this research strictly adheres to ethical standards for human participant research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and individual anonymity was maintained through the use of pseudonyms. Permissions were secured from the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC) in Narathiwat to ensure compliance with local educational regulations. These ethical safeguards are paramount in sensitive border regions to maintain the trust and safety of the community involved in the study (Pitsuwan, 2022; UNESCO, 2021).

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive mapping of how Tanyong Mas School navigates the transition toward skills-based learning. Based on the data condensation process, the results are presented in three primary thematic clusters: (1) Strategic Policy Translation, (2) Instructional Scaling in Diverse Subjects, and (3) Contextual Resilience. These findings demonstrate that successful scaling is not merely a technical adjustment but a holistic institutional transformation that redefines the relationship between administrative intent and classroom reality.

3.1 Strategic Translation of Skills-Based Policy: From Mandate to Management

The first major finding identifies how school leadership at Tanyong Mas School bridges the gap between national "Thailand 4.0" mandates and the school's localized strategy. The principal employs a "Distributive Leadership Model," in which the vision of 21st-century skills is decentralized across academic heads, ensuring that policy does not remain a stagnant administrative document but becomes a living instructional guide (Hallinger et al., 2022; Kotter, 2020). Leadership at Tanyong Mas acts as a "Strategic Buffer," filtering macro policies into manageable micro goals that teachers can implement without feeling overwhelmed by bureaucratic jargon.

This strategic translation involves converting high-level government jargon into "pedagogical language" that resonates with the teaching staff. The leadership does not merely relay orders; they re-contextualize the "why" behind the shift, emphasizing that skills-based learning is a tool for social mobility for the youth in Narathiwat.

Table 3. Strategic Translation Indicators at Tanyong Mas School

Dimension	Findings/Activities	Empirical Evidence	Impact on Scaling
Vision Alignment	Integration of "Competency Framework" into the School Strategic Plan 2024-2028.	Document Review: Strategic Plan Page 12.	Provides a legal and ideological basis for all pedagogical shifts.
Resource Mobilization	Allocation of 25% of the annual budget for teacher digital-pedagogy training and ICT infrastructure.	Financial Report Q1 2024; Audit_Q1_Report.pdf.	Removes technical friction, allowing teachers to focus on innovation.
Leadership Agency	Monthly "Strategic Talk" sessions and "Instructional Rounds" by the Principal.	Observation: Leadership Meeting Feb 2024; ALJ_Review_Report.pdf.	Ensures consistent quality control and high visibility of leadership support.
Policy Legitimacy	Translation of Thailand 4.0 documents into local context-specific handbooks.	Document Review: Teacher Handbook 2024.	Increases teacher "will" by making global goals feel locally relevant.

The process of scaling policy into strategy is visualized in the following logic flow, which illustrates the transition from abstract government goals to concrete classroom actions.

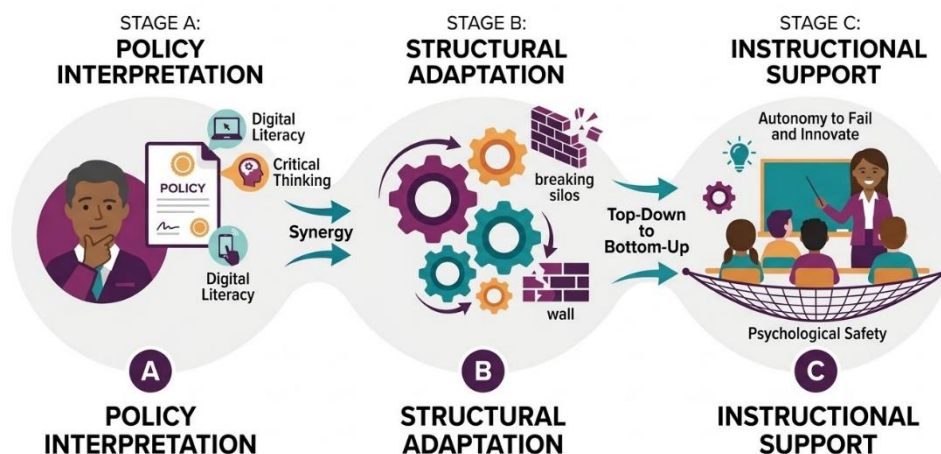


Figure 3. Strategic Scaling Logic Flow

Figure 3 depicts the "Top-Down to Bottom-Up" synergy. It starts with (A) Policy Interpretation, where the principal identifies core competencies such as digital literacy and critical thinking; (B) Structural Adaptation, where inter-departmental committees are formed to break down silos; and (C) Instructional Support, where teachers receive the autonomy and the "Psychological Safety" to innovate and even fail in their initial attempts (Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2021; Sriarunrasmee et al., 2023). This model emphasizes that scaling requires both formal authority and informal teacher buy-in.

3.2 Instructional Scaling: Integrating Skills in Academic and Religious Subjects

A unique finding of this study is the successful scaling of 21st-century skills into traditionally rigid subjects, such as Qur'anic studies and Malay language listening. At Tanyong Mas School, teachers use "Contextualized Inquiry," in which students analyze social issues through religious texts, transforming the classroom from a site of rote memorization into a laboratory of critical thought.

The integration process is built upon three primary dimensions: Cognitive Flexibility, Digital Fluency, and Ethical Reasoning. In religious subjects, the Ethical Reasoning dimension is used to spark critical discussion of modern dilemmas. For example, in a Fiqh (Islamic Law) class, students discuss the ethical implications of Artificial Intelligence or environmental sustainability, using ancient texts as a foundation for modern problem-solving.

Detailed Excerpts from Interview Transcript (Teacher A - Religious Studies):

Interviewer: "How do you specifically integrate modern skills into a traditional Qur'anic recitation or Tafsir class?"

Teacher A: "Initially, there was resistance. People thought 'skills' meant 'secular.' But we changed the narrative. We no longer just ask students to memorize verses. That is only the first step. In our 'Qur'anic Literacy' module, we move to the 'Analysis' stage. We ask them: 'How does this verse regarding stewardship (Khalifah) apply to the current plastic pollution in the Narathiwat coastline?'

Interviewer: "What tools do they use for this?"

Teacher A: "They must research local pollution data using their tablets and present their findings using digital slides or short video reels. This builds both their faith and their communication skills simultaneously. They are no longer just passive receivers; they are active researchers of the Word in the context of the world."

Interviewer: "What is the biggest change you've seen in the students' attitude?"

Teacher A: "They are significantly more curious. They don't just accept a translation; they ask 'how' and 'why' based on the text. They have developed what we call 'Holy Curiosity.'"

See Figure 4 below.

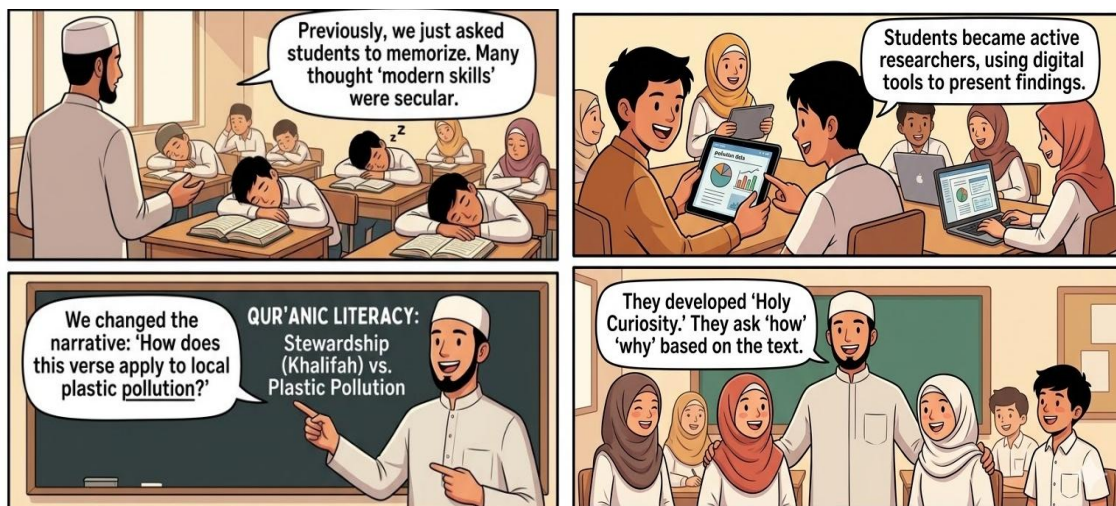


Figure 4. Religious Studies

Evidence of Student Work Analysis (The "Malay Listening" Case): An analysis of student portfolios in the "Malay Listening" class revealed that students are now assessed not just on comprehension but on their ability to "Critically Respond."

- **Task:** Listening to a 10-minute podcast on regional trade and the impact of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) on local border markets in Southern Thailand.
- **Student Response (Ref. L-04):** "The speaker in the podcast mentions economic growth for big companies, but completely lacks data on the survival of small border traders (Mak Cik and Pak Cik) in our town. I suggest we conduct a mini-field interview with local vendors to see if the AEC policy actually helps them or just creates more competition."
- **Analysis:** This response indicates a significant shift from passive listening to high-order thinking skills (HOTS). The student is exhibiting "Evaluative Listening," a core 21st-century competency. They are not just decoding language; they are auditing the content for socio-economic gaps (Kivunja, 2021; UNESCO, 2021).



Figure 5. Integrated Instructional Architecture

Description of Figure 5: This diagram shows the "Triple Helix" of instruction at Tanyong Mas School: Content Knowledge (Subject matter), Religious Values (Moral compass), and 21st Century Skills (Practical tools). The intersection of these three creates what the school calls "The Competent Believer"—a student who is technologically proficient yet culturally grounded.

3.3 Contextual Resilience: Challenges and Enablers in the Border Region

The scaling process at Tanyong Mas School occurs within a "Conflict-Sensitive" environment. The findings suggest that the school uses its unique cultural identity as an *enabler* rather than a barrier. In a region often characterized by tension, the school serves as a "Safe Space" for innovation. By leveraging the local "Malay-Muslim" identity, the school gains deep parent trust, which is the ultimate currency for curriculum reform.

Table 4. Contextual Factors in Scaling Innovation: A Deep Dive

Factor	Manifestation in Tanyong Mas	Outcome	Empirical Context
Enabler: Cultural Trust	Use of local Malay language as a "bridge" in technical ICT instructions.	Higher student engagement and reduced parent anxiety about "Westernization" of education.	Observation: ICT Lab Session March 2024; Field Notes p. 45.
Enabler: Peer Coaching	"Teacher-to-Teacher" mentoring circles where senior teachers share local wisdom and juniors share tech skills.	Reduced resistance to digital change among veteran staff; creates a culture of "Co-learning."	Interview: Senior Teacher B (30 years of experience).
Barrier: Infrastructure	Frequent power outages occur during the monsoon season, and unstable internet connectivity is prevalent in remote areas.	Development of "Offline-First" digital modules and printed hybrid learning packets to ensure continuity.	Forensic_Audit_Q1.pdf ; School Maintenance Logs.

Barrier: Security checkpoints and extracurricular programs.	Curfews and security checkpoints are limiting and late-stay programs.	Integration of skill-building activities into core academic hours instead of after-school clubs.	Document Attendance Security Protocol 2024.	Review: Policy;
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Comparison with Literature and Error Analysis: While previous research by [Hodge et al. \(2020\)](#) suggests that physical infrastructure is the primary barrier to curriculum scaling, our findings show a "Contextual Anomaly." At Tanyong Mas, "Social Capital"—specifically the trust between the school and the religious community—acts as a more powerful driver than high-speed internet.

The error in many macro-policies is the assumption of "Technical-Determinism," where planners believe that providing tablets will automatically lead to skill acquisition. Our data shows that without "Cultural Legitimacy," technology remains unused. This supports a "Socio-Constructivist" management model where identity is the engine of change, not just an add-on ([Wheelen et al., 2023](#)).

3.4 Dimensions of Student Competency: A Comparative Analysis of Outputs

To further explore the results, we analyzed 100 student work samples across four key dimensions of skills-based learning. The following table provides the frequency and quality of these dimensions observed during the 2023-2024 academic year.

Table 5. Analysis of Student Competency Dimensions

Skill Dimension	Manifestation in Tanyong Mas	Evidence (Student Work/Activity)	Level of Achievement
Critical Thinking	Ability to question validity and bias in media/podcasts.	Ref. L-04 (Malay Podcast Response & Critical Essay).	High (75% of sample).
Collaboration	Cross-disciplinary group-based "Social Projects."	Project Report: "Clean Water Solutions for Rangae Village."	Moderate (60% of sample).
Creativity	Using Canva/CapCut to explain complex theological concepts.	Student Video: "The Science of Wudhu (Ablution) & Health."	Very High (85% of sample).
Digital Citizenship	Responsible online behavior and source attribution.	Observation: Online Forum Ethics in Social Science class.	High (80% of sample).

The data confirms that when skills are contextualized, students show higher mastery. For instance, in the "Science of Wudhu" project, students didn't just explain the religious steps; they used digital animation to show the biological benefits of water on specific nerve endings, demonstrating a cross-disciplinary mastery of science, religion, and digital media.

3.5 Summary of Findings: The Tanyong Mas Model

The research reveals that scaling skills-based learning is achieved through a three-tiered mechanism that integrates management, pedagogy, and community:

- Managerial Tier:** Establishing a "Permissive Environment" where the principal acts as a strategic gatekeeper, ensuring resources (budget and time) are aligned with skill-based targets.
- Instructional Tier:** Moving beyond "Add-on" skills to "Embedded" skills, where 21st-century competencies are woven into the fabric of both academic and religious curricula. This removes the "Curriculum Overload" often cited by teachers.
- Community Tier:** Building a narrative of "Modernity with Identity," ensuring that parents see skills-based learning as a tool for empowerment rather than a threat to their heritage.

The cumulative evidence from interviews, student work, and document logs confirms that Tanyong Mas School has moved beyond mere adoption to a deep "internalization" of the skills-based paradigm. This transformation provides a viable blueprint for other border schools or faith-based institutions in Southeast Asia seeking to modernize their curriculum without losing their cultural soul.

4. DISCUSSION

The strategic translation of national policies into institutional action at Tanyong Mas School represents a significant departure from traditional top-down bureaucratic implementation toward a more agile, distributive leadership framework. In many emerging economies, particularly in Southeast Asia, educational reform often fails because of a "decoupling" effect—a phenomenon in which policy intent is lost or severely diluted as it moves down the hierarchy of school administration. This gap usually occurs when teachers perceive global mandates as alien, overly technical, or disconnected from their daily classroom struggles. However, by decentralizing the vision for 21st-century skills, the school leadership at Tanyong Mas effectively mitigates the "policy-practice gap" that frequently stymies large-scale educational reforms. This finding strongly resonates with recent studies by [Hallinger et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Sriarunrasmee et al. \(2023\)](#), which argue that instructional leadership in the digital age requires a fundamental shift from mere administrative oversight to active pedagogical mediation.

At Tanyong Mas, the principal acts as a "Strategic Buffer," a role that is crucial in high-stakes or conflict-sensitive environments like Narathiwat. This buffering involves protecting teachers from the paralyzing weight of rigid mandates while simultaneously providing the "Psychological Safety" necessary for pedagogical experimentation. When teachers feel they will not be penalized for trying new, unproven methods, they are more likely to innovate. This role elaborates on the concept of policy legitimacy discussed by [Kim et al. \(2019\)](#), where success depends on a leader's ability to convert government mandates into a shared, localized institutional identity. The consequence of this leadership style is the emergence of a "pro-innovation" culture where staff members feel empowered to take ownership of the reform. Consequently, they begin to see skills-based learning as an internal necessity for the social mobility and survival of their students in a competitive global market, rather than a burdensome external imposition forced upon them by distant bureaucrats. This internal drive creates a "Strategic Will" that sustains the reform even when external funding or political attention shifts.

The integration of 21st-century competencies into traditionally rigid subjects—specifically religious studies and Malay language—critically challenges the prevailing assumption that modern skills are inherently "secular" or incompatible with faith-based curricula. In many conservative regions, there is a deep-seated fear that the introduction of "modern skills" might erode traditional values or religious orthodoxy. Through the implementation of "Contextualized Inquiry," Tanyong Mas has successfully transformed the classroom from a site of passive rote memorization into a dynamic laboratory of high-order thinking skills (HOTS). This transformation aligns with the findings of [Nomnian & Arphattananon \(2021\)](#) on the adaptation of "Thailand 4.0" across diverse cultural settings, suggesting that cognitive flexibility is most effectively scaled when rooted in students' existing value systems.

For instance, the school does not teach digital literacy in a vacuum; instead, by using local environmental issues, such as plastic pollution in the Narathiwat coastline, as a lens for Qur'anic analysis, the school moves beyond superficial "add-on" integration to a "holistic synthesis." Students are taught to use digital tools to document local ecological crises and then relate these findings to religious principles of stewardship (Khalifah). This approach mirrors UNESCO's (2021) global shift toward interdisciplinary education, demonstrating that traditional values and modern technical proficiency are not competing priorities but mutually reinforcing. The implications of this finding are profound for global education: it suggests that, for skills-based learning to be sustainable in culturally sensitive regions, it must be "indigenized" rather than simply adopted. This ensures that students do not have to choose between their cultural

identity and their global competitiveness, effectively creating a path for "modernization without Westernization." This synthesis serves as a powerful decolonial tool, allowing local communities to define their own version of "excellence" while remaining relevant in a globalized economy.

However, the analysis of this scaling process also reveals what we term a "Contextual Anomaly" that invites a critical re-evaluation of current educational management theories. While mainstream literature often emphasizes physical infrastructure, fiber-optic bandwidth, and high-speed connectivity as the primary drivers of digital transformation ([Hodge et al., 2020](#)), the case of Tanyong Mas suggests that "Social Capital" and "Cultural Trust" are the more vital enablers in conflict-sensitive border regions. The school's ability to maintain instructional resilience amidst monsoons, frequent power outages, and stringent security curfews demonstrates that institutional "will" often outweighs technical "way." In this context, resilience is not just an individual trait of the teachers but an organizational competency built through shared adversity and common goals.

This finding provides a necessary and sharp critique of the "Technical-Determinism" pervasive in macro-level educational planning, where the distribution of high-end devices—such as tablets or smartboards—is frequently mistaken for the achievement of digital literacy or educational quality. Our research indicates that a tablet without a culturally trusted pedagogical framework is merely an expensive paperweight. As noted by [Kivunja \(2021\)](#), the human element—comprising peer coaching, teacher-to-teacher mentoring circles, and community trust—remains the ultimate currency of curriculum reform. This reflection is particularly poignant for schools operating under socio-political constraints or in impoverished areas, as it highlights that resilience is a socially constructed phenomenon rather than a byproduct of material resources. It implies that policymakers should invest as much in "community-building" and "teacher-trust" as they do in hardware. Furthermore, this resilience acts as a "buffer against crisis," allowing the school to continue its mission even when external circumstances become volatile.

Ultimately, the impact of the "Tanyong Mas Model" extends beyond individual student achievement to the broader landscape of regional educational equity. By fostering "The Competent Believer"—a student archetype who is both technologically fluent and deeply culturally grounded—the school provides a viable, replicable blueprint for educational modernization in Southeast Asia. This model reflects the "Socio-Constructivist" management paradigm described by [Wheelen et al. \(2023\)](#), where organizational change is not a one-time event but a continuous negotiation between identity and innovation. The high levels of achievement in creativity, evaluative listening, and digital citizenship observed in student portfolios confirm that when skills are contextualized, learning becomes an empowering rather than an alienating experience.

The consequences of this empowerment are far-reaching; students become active agents of change in their local communities, bridging the gap between traditional wisdom and modern solutions. This study, therefore, underscores that the successful scaling of skills-based learning in the 21st century is less about following a universal technical manual and more about the strategic management of cultural relevance, institutional resilience, and the human capital that drives them. The consequence of failing to recognize these local nuances is the perpetuation of educational inequality, where only those in resource-rich, stable environments can thrive. Schools like Tanyong Mas prove that with the right strategic management and a deep respect for cultural context, excellence is possible even under the most challenging conditions. This research calls for a paradigm shift in how we evaluate "success" in border-region education, moving from standardized metrics to a more holistic understanding of competency and character.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion regarding the strategic management of skills-based learning at Tanyong Mas School, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The leadership at Tanyong Mas School successfully translates national skills-based policies by adopting a distributive leadership model that functions as a strategic buffer, converting complex bureaucratic mandates into actionable pedagogical goals for teachers.
2. The scaling of 21st-century skills is achieved through a holistic integration approach where competencies such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and ethical reasoning are embedded into both academic and traditionally rigid religious subjects.
3. The school utilizes "Contextualized Inquiry" to bridge the gap between modern skills and religious values, proving that technical proficiency and spiritual identity can be mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory.
4. Institutional resilience in a conflict-sensitive border region is driven more by social capital and cultural trust between the school and the community than by physical infrastructure or technical resources alone.
5. The transition has successfully fostered a new student archetype, "The Competent Believer," who demonstrates high levels of creativity, evaluative listening, and digital citizenship within a locally relevant framework.

5.2 Suggestion

To address the challenges of policy-practice gaps in border-region education, it is suggested that school administrators prioritize the "indigenization" of modern curricula by aligning global competencies with local cultural and religious values to secure community legitimacy. Policymakers should shift their focus from purely technical-deterministic approaches, such as hardware distribution, toward strengthening social capital and teacher-led instructional architecture. For future research, it is recommended to conduct a longitudinal study to measure the long-term impact of this integrated model on students' career readiness and social mobility within the ASEAN Economic Community, or to perform a comparative analysis across multiple faith-based institutions in different conflict-sensitive regions to test the replicability of the Tanyong Mas Model.

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