CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Problem

Education is a critical driver of social and economic development, particularly in culturally diverse and politically sensitive regions such as Yala, Thailand. As part of the country's Deep South, Yala faces unique challenges in governance and education, influenced by socio-political tensions, cultural diversity, and policy misalignment. While public management plays a central role in shaping education policy, its effectiveness in supporting teacher professional development and fostering community engagement remains underexplored.

The Thai government has implemented decentralization policies and teacher development programs to improve education across the country, including in Yala. However, disparities in education outcomes persist. Many teachers in Yala struggle with professional development opportunities that align with the region's cultural and linguistic context. Training programs are often designed with a one-size-fits-all approach, overlooking the specific needs of educators working in Islamic schools (Pondok), bilingual education settings, and culturally diverse classrooms. Additionally, the implementation of professional development initiatives, including teacher training and curriculum reforms, has faced barriers in accessibility, relevance, and practical application.

Beyond teacher development, community engagement in education governance remains a challenge. While national policies emphasize stakeholder participation in school management, local community leaders and parents often

perceive decision-making processes as top-down and disconnected from their lived realities. Public management frameworks that guide education policy implementation in Yala often lack mechanisms for meaningful dialogue with local stakeholders, leading to low trust, limited participation, and policy inefficacy.

Despite numerous studies on public administration and education policy in Thailand, limited research has examined how teachers and community leaders in Yala perceive the impact of public management practices on educational outcomes. There is a need to assess stakeholder perspectives on existing governance approaches, identify areas for improvement, and propose culturally responsive adaptations to public management strategies in education.

As per statistical data, Yala Province presents a unique and complex educational landscape. Despite national advancements in education, Yala faces persistent challenges that hinder equitable educational outcomes as follows:

Firstly, Educational Disparities. Although Thailand has achieved a youth literacy rate of around 98%, educational inequalities persist in areas such as Yala.[1] In 2022, just 44.2% of young people in Yala were enrolled in the formal education system, a figure well below the national average of 79.3%. This gap underscores systemic issues affecting educational access and retention in the province.[2] Secondly, Teacher Shortages. While there is not specific data readily available for a precise "teacher shortage rate" in the specific region of Yala, it's generally understood that Thailand, and areas like Yala, face teacher shortages.[3]

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[1] Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC). 2018. "National Education Profile 2018 Update."
[2] International Labour Organization. 2022. "Promoting Youth Employment in Songkhla and Yala, Thailand: A Situation Analysis."
[3] Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. 2022. "Social Situation in Yala Province."

Thirdly, socioeconomic factors. Yala's poverty rate stood at 17.4% in 2021, with economic hardship being a significant barrier to education. Poverty not only limits access to educational resources but also contributes to higher dropout rates and lower educational attainment. Fourthly, cultural and linguistic challenges. The province's predominantly Malay-Muslim population often faces cultural and linguistic barriers within the Thai education system. The lack of culturally responsive curricula and instruction in the local language can lead to disengagement and lower academic achievement among students.[4] Fifthly, policy implementation gaps. Even with decentralization initiatives, a gap persists between national education policies and the realities at the local level. Top-down policy frameworks frequently overlook the distinct cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic conditions in provinces such as Yala, resulting in poor implementation and limited effectiveness.

Yala is part of Thailand's "Deep South," a region with a legacy of resistance linked to the early 20th-century annexation of the Malay Sultanate of Patani by Siam (modern-day Thailand) through the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. This incorporation ignored the ethnic, religious, and linguistic distinctions of the region's Malay Muslim population, creating a foundation for the ongoing conflict.[5] The region's political conflict is characterized by ethnic Malay Muslims' distinct identity, defined by the Yawi language and Islamic faith, contrasting with the predominantly Buddhist central government of Thailand.[6]

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[4] United Nations Children's Fund. 2019. "Thailand Education Fact Sheets 2019: Analyses for Learning and Equity Using MICS Data."
[5] Deep South Watch. (2021). *Summary of Incidents in Southern Thailand.* Deep South Watch.
[6] McCargo, Duncan. 2008. *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand.* Cornell University Press.

As of October 2023, Yala Province has a total population of 451,042 people, according to the Yala Public Health Office. This population is composed of 221,877 males and 229,165 females.[7] The population is ethnically diverse, with approximately 72% identifying as ethnic Malay Muslims, making them the majority group in the province. The remaining population includes 27% ethnic Thais, predominantly Buddhist, and a small percentage of other ethnic minorities, including Chinese-Thai communities.[8]

Ethnic Malays in Yala have historically maintained distinct cultural and linguistic practices, primarily using the Yawi language, a local variant of Malay. This linguistic and cultural distinction has been a source of contention, as government policies promoting Thai language and culture are often seen as tools of assimilation rather than integration. These efforts, coupled with the centralization of political authority, have fueled longstanding grievances and contributed to cycles of conflict and mistrust.[9] The presence of ethnic Thai Buddhists in the province, often associated with the state apparatus, further complicates the socio-political landscape. Buddhist communities frequently experience security threats from insurgent groups, while Malay Muslims face structural challenges, such as underrepresentation in government and perceived cultural marginalization. These dynamics underscore the complex interplay of ethnicity, religion, and politics in shaping public management and community trust in Yala.

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[5] Deep South Watch. (2021). *Summary of Incidents in Southern Thailand*. Deep South Watch.
[6] McCargo, Duncan. 2008. *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand*. Cornell University Press.
[7] National Statistical Office of Thailand. (2021). *Statistical Yearbook Thailand 2021*.
[8] International Crisis Group. 2017. 'Jihadism in Southern Thailand: A Phantom Menace'.
[9] Pherali, Tejendra. 2023. 'Social Justice, Education and Peacebuilding: Conflict Transformation in Southern Thailand'. *Compare* 53(4).

Another part to look at is historical context of education in Yala. Education policies in Yala have long been influenced by centralization efforts aimed at unifying national identity, often at the expense of local cultural representation. The national curriculum, which prioritizes Thai language and Buddhist cultural content, has been implemented without accounting for the linguistic and religious diversity. This approach has alienated many Malay Muslims, who see state-run schools as promoting an "invasive" Thai Buddhist identity, thereby compromising their Islamic and heritage.[10]

Additionally, Pondok and madrasa schools in Yala—have been scrutinized by the Thai state for perceived connections to separatist activities. Government oversight often clashes with the cultural and religious objectives of these institutions, fostering further tension. As a result, many Malay Muslims prefer private Islamic schools, which align more closely with their cultural values but lack sufficient resources, affecting the quality of education.[11]

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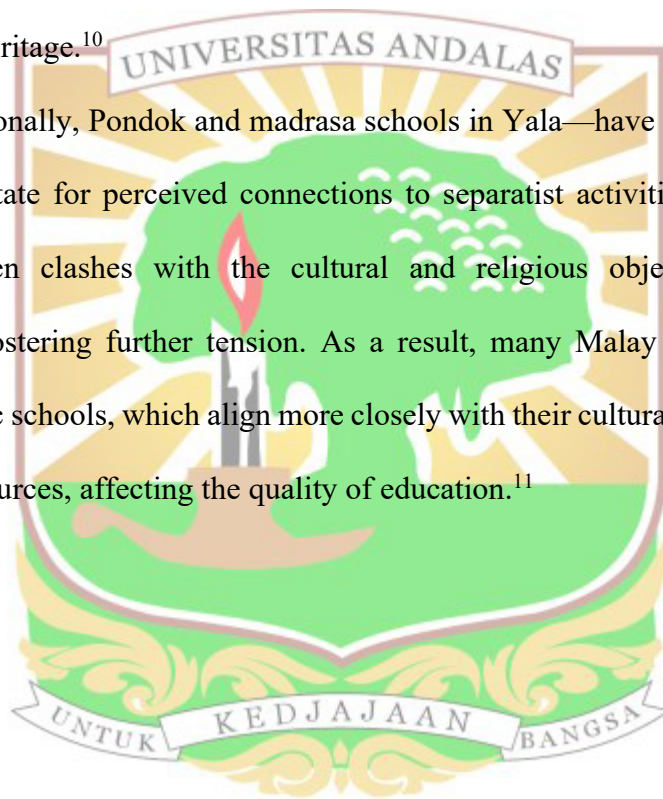
[10] McCargo, Duncan. 2010. 'Autonomy for Southern Thailand: Thinking the Unthinkable?' *Pacific Affairs* 83(2).

[11] Uddin, Md Nasir, Saran Sarntisart, and Syed Mahbubur Rahman. 2022. 'The Role of Household Structure, Parental Education and Income on Children Schooling in Thailand: A Gender-Based Perspective'. In *International Journal of Management in Education*. Vol. 16.

The following table below shows the comparative analysis about national education policy and Yala. Thailand's national education policy emphasizes standardization and centralized governance, reflecting the broader goals of national unity and cultural homogeneity. However, these policies often clash with the unique socio-cultural and linguistic realities of Yala Province, where the predominantly Malay Muslim population has distinct educational needs.

Table 1.1: National Education Policy vs. Yala Province

Aspect	National Education Policy	Education in Yala Province	Implications
Curriculum Content	Standardized national curriculum emphasizing Thai language, Buddhist values, and centralized themes.	Cultural and religious misalignment with Malay Muslim identity; limited integration of Islamic values and Yawi language.	Alienation of Yala's students, high dropout rates, and low engagement with state-run education.
Language of Instruction	Thai language is the medium of instruction across all subjects.	Yawi language (local Malay dialect) is the primary spoken language; limited bilingual education programs available.	Language barriers hinder comprehension and participation, leading to educational disparities.
School Governance	Centralized decision-making by the Ministry of Education in Bangkok.	Local schools have minimal autonomy to adapt to regional needs; Pondok schools operate independently but lack resources.	Top-down governance undermines local relevance and trust; underfunded Islamic schools face systemic challenges.
Teacher Recruitment	Teachers assigned nationwide with little focus on local linguistic or cultural competencies.	Teachers often lack proficiency in Yawi or understanding of Islamic cultural practices.	Misalignment between teachers and community needs leads to poor student-teacher relationships.

Policy Focus	National unity and standardized testing as performance metrics.	Emphasis on preserving Malay Muslim identity through informal and religious education (e.g., Pondok schools).	Diverging priorities create tension between state policies and local community values.[12]

Source: Data processed by researcher in 2024

To assess the effectiveness of education policy in Yala Province, it is necessary to first understand the structure and intent of Thailand's national education policy. Over the past two decades, Thailand has implemented a series of comprehensive reforms aimed at decentralizing education governance, increasing autonomy for local institutions, and promoting equality in access and quality.[13] However, the effectiveness of these policies in regions with unique socio-cultural dynamics, such as Yala, remains contested.[14]

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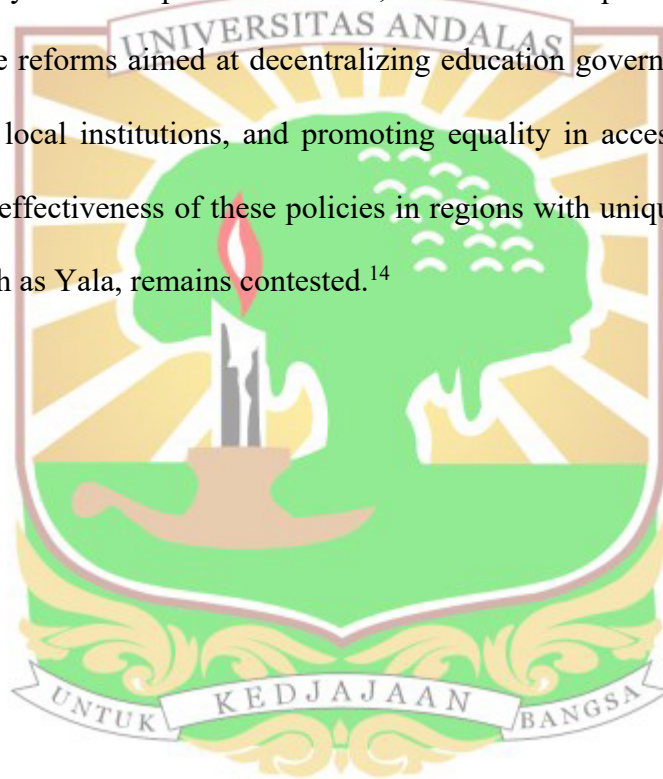
[12] Brooks, Melanie C., and Ekkarin Sungtong. 2015. *The Challenge of Multicultural Education During Insurgency: The Case of Southernmost Thailand*. Edited by Gaetane Jean-Marie, S. Sider, and C. Desir. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

[13] Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC). 1999. 'National Education Act'. Government of Thailand. 1999.

[14] Office of the Education Council (OEC). 2017. 'Education Reform Plan 2017–2036'. Ministry of Education, Thailand. 2017.

Using William Dunn's (2017) policy analysis framework, this section evaluates the national policy through five analytical dimensions: problem structuring, forecasting, recommendation, monitoring, and evaluation. First part is problem structuring: At the national level, Thailand's education policy identifies inequality and inefficiency as central problems, particularly in remote areas. However, the way these issues are conceptualized often fails to incorporate ethno-religious and linguistic diversity, such as that found in Yala Province. While central policy recognizes rural underdevelopment, it underrepresents the cultural and religious identity of Malay-Muslim communities, leading to a mismatch between policy design and local needs.

Second Part is policy forecasting and implementation: Thailand's decentralized education policy theoretically allows provinces like Yala to adapt curriculum and management to local conditions. However, research indicates that local offices often lack the capacity, autonomy, or political will to diverge from centrally standardized practices.[15] This results in limited adaptation of teacher training content, student assessment methods, and curriculum delivery, which are frequently presented only in Thai and disconnected from local Islamic values or language (Yawi).[16]

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[15] Mutebi, Alex M. 2004. 'Thailand's Decentralization: Progress and Prospects'. *Asian Journal of Political Science* 12 (1): 35–53.

[16] Lall, Marie. 2011. 'Education as a Political Tool in the Asia-Pacific: The Case of Thailand'. *Compare* 41 (3):339–52.

Third part is policy recommendations and cultural relevance: Although national education frameworks encourage participatory governance and inclusive education, they do not provide clear mechanisms for integrating community voices into school management, particularly from underrepresented religious and ethnic minorities. In Yala, teachers and community leaders often feel excluded from educational planning, and teacher professional development programs are not sufficiently tailored to local realities, such as bilingual pedagogy or intercultural communication.

Fourth part is monitoring and feedback: There is limited systematic evaluation of how decentralized policies are implemented in multicultural provinces. For example, performance indicators used in national monitoring systems rarely capture cultural inclusion, language accessibility, or religious sensitivity. This creates a gap between policy intentions and real-world educational outcomes, particularly for students and educators in minority contexts like Yala.

Fifth part is evaluation and effectiveness in Yala: The practical effectiveness of national education policies in Yala remains constrained by bureaucratic uniformity and cultural blind spots. While the Ministry of Education promotes innovation and flexibility, schools in Yala often operate under rigid guidelines that do not allow for meaningful cultural adaptation. As a result, student learning outcomes in the Deep South remain below national averages, and community trust in public education governance is low.

This comparative analysis reveals that Thailand's education policy, while progressive in its decentralization objectives, falls short in culturally diverse and politically sensitive contexts. From a public management perspective, the disconnect between central policy design and local realities highlights the need for:

- More participatory and context-sensitive implementation strategies

- Localized teacher development programs

- Stronger mechanisms for stakeholder engagement

By integrating policy analysis theory with public management approaches, this study seeks to explore how local actors—teachers and community leaders—perceive the effectiveness of governance mechanisms, and what adaptations are necessary for policies to be more inclusive and impactful in Yala's education system.

On the other hands, challenges faced by the educational system in Yala. Yala's education system faces critical challenges related to security, economic hardship, and cultural representation. The ongoing insurgency has led to targeted violence against teachers and the destruction of schools. This has severely disrupted the educational process, with attacks leading to the closure of numerous schools and the death or injury of teachers, students, and civilians. After incidents like the Krue Se Mosque and Tak Bai tragedies in 2004, approximately 76% of public schools were temporarily shut down in the Deep South, illustrating the devastating impact of conflict on education.[17]

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[17] Human Rights Watch. (2010) "Targets of Both Sides, Violence against Students, Teachers, and Schools in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces." Human Rights Watch. 2010.

Poverty further compounds the region's educational challenges, as economic instability limits students' access to continuous and quality education. Many families prioritize subsistence activities over schooling, and the region's educational infrastructure remains underfunded compared to other areas of Thailand. Additionally, Malay Muslim students often experience educational disparity, with a schooling gap of nearly one year compared to students in non-conflict regions. Cultural factors are also significant, as the mainstream Thai-language curriculum tends to sideline Yawi-speaking students. Many families feel that this curriculum neglects their linguistic identity, which contributes to reduced school attendance and higher dropout rates. The lack of inclusive education policies continues to reinforce patterns of disengagement and poor academic performance.

Furthermore, Public management plays a critical role in shaping the effectiveness of governance, particularly in sectors such as education, where policies and administrative frameworks influence overall educational outcomes. As an evolving field, public management incorporates principles from New Public Management (NPM), Public Value Management (PVM), and Good Governance to enhance efficiency, accountability, and service delivery.[18] In conflict-affected regions like Yala, Thailand, the role of public management becomes even more pronounced, as the education sector must navigate socio-political challenges, cultural complexities, and administrative constraints.

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[18] Osborne, Stephen P. 2006. 'The New Public Governance?' *Public Management Review* 8 (3): 377–87.

The governance of education in Yala is embedded within Thailand's broader decentralization efforts, which aim to grant greater autonomy to local authorities while maintaining centralized oversight.[19] However, the persistent challenges of bureaucratic inefficiencies, resource allocation, and limited community engagement hinder the effectiveness of these policies. Public management practices, particularly in teacher professional development and community engagement, are crucial for fostering a more adaptive and inclusive education system.

Existing studies indicate that in conflict-affected regions, a top-down approach to public management often fails to address local needs.[20] Instead, a participatory model that integrates community stakeholders, particularly teachers and local leaders, is essential for policy effectiveness. The unique socio-cultural dynamics of Yala require tailored public management strategies that are responsive to local concerns while aligning with national education policies.

The gap in the current literature highlights a need to examine how teachers and community leaders perceive the effectiveness of public management strategies in Yala's education sector. By understanding these perceptions, this research aims to provide insights into how public management can be adapted to enhance teacher professional development and strengthen community engagement in educational programs.

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[19] Painter, Martin. 2006. 'Thaksinisation or Managerialism? Reforming the Thai Bureaucracy'. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 36 (1): 26–47.

[20] Brinkerhoff, Derick W. 2011. 'State Fragility and Governance: Conflict Mitigation and Subnational Perspectives'. *Development Policy Review* 29 (2).

Despite a wealth of research on the socio-political dynamics and conflict in Southern Thailand, the educational dimension remains underexplored, particularly from the perspective of local communities. Existing studies often focus on quantitative indicators, such as literacy rates and school enrollment statistics, which provide limited insight into the lived experiences and perceptions of Yala's residents regarding public management and education policies.[21]

Furthermore, current research tends to emphasize the political and economic factors driving the conflict, with less attention given to how public management strategies intersect with educational policies in culturally diverse and conflict-prone settings. While the Thai government has introduced various initiatives to improve education in Yala, little is known about how these efforts are perceived by the local, particularly in terms of cultural relevance, inclusivity, and trust-building.

The gap in understanding community perceptions is critical, as these perceptions play a significant role in determining the success or failure of public policies. For instance, policies perceived as tools of cultural assimilation are likely to face resistance, undermining their effectiveness and exacerbating tensions. Conversely, community-informed approaches that incorporate local voices and cultural sensitivities have the potential to foster trust, improve educational outcomes, and contribute to peacebuilding.[22]

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[21] Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. 2018. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches.* 5th ed. Sage Publications.
[22] Stringer, Ernest T. 2014. *Action Research.* 4th ed. *SAGE Publication*.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by exploring the perceptions of Yala's communities regarding public management and educational improvement. By adopting a qualitative, community-based participatory approach, the research aims to provide actionable insights that can inform more effective and culturally responsive public policies in Yala.

1.2 Problem Formulation

Public management is vital in structuring education systems, affecting policy formulation, resource distribution, and stakeholder participation. In Yala, Thailand — a region marked by socio-cultural diversity and historical conflicts — advancing educational development demands an approach that is sensitive to local contexts. Nevertheless, despite multiple government initiatives, inequalities remain in educational quality, teacher professional growth, and community engagement.

One of the primary challenges in Yala's education system is the alignment between public management practices and the needs of local teachers and communities. While national education policies emphasize professional development for teachers and community-driven education, stakeholders often perceive these initiatives as misaligned with Yala's cultural, linguistic, and socio-political realities. The effectiveness of governance strategies in enhancing teacher capacity and engaging local communities in education policymaking remains underexplored, particularly from the perspectives of those directly involved-teachers and community leaders.

To address this gap, this study investigates how public management strategies related to teacher professional development and community engagement impact education in Yala. The research aims to identify stakeholder perceptions and explore necessary adaptations to ensure governance approaches align with the region's unique educational and cultural needs.

This research, therefore, seeks to address the following core questions:

1) **How do teachers and community leaders in Yala perceive the impact of public management practices related to *teacher professional development* on *student learning outcomes*, considering the unique socio-cultural context of the region?**

   - **Explanation:** This question focuses on a specific area of public management (teacher professional development) and a measurable outcome (student learning outcomes). By focusing on teacher professional development, you can investigate how public management efforts to improve teacher skills and knowledge are perceived to affect student performance in Yala. The question also keeps the socio-cultural context central, acknowledging that the effectiveness of these practices may depend on cultural sensitivity and relevance. Limiting the scope of this question is student learning outcomes, a common metric that can be extracted from data collection.

2) What *specific* adaptations to public management approaches regarding *community engagement* are perceived by teachers and community leaders as necessary to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of educational programs in Yala?

- **Explanation:** This question emphasizes the need for culturally relevant and effective community engagement. It directs the research toward identifying concrete adaptations that can be made to existing public management strategies. By focusing on specific adaptations, the research aims to provide actionable recommendations for improving the relevance and effectiveness of education. The question directly asks what is necessary from the community and teachers' perspective.

These questions aim to uncover insights into the local community's perceptions, providing actionable recommendations for fostering culturally inclusive public policies that bridge the gap between national education goals and regional needs.

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to explore how public management practices influence teacher professional development and community engagement in education governance in Yala, Thailand. Given the region's cultural diversity and socio-political complexities, understanding the perspectives of teachers and community leaders is essential for designing governance strategies that are both effective and contextually relevant.

To address the research problem, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1) **To analyze how teachers and community leaders in Yala perceive the impact of public management practices related to teacher professional development on student learning outcomes, considering the unique socio-cultural context of the region.**

   This objective examines how public management approaches to teacher training, professional development programs, and curriculum implementation affect teaching quality and student learning outcomes in Yala. Despite national education policies aiming to enhance teacher competency, existing programs may not fully address the needs of educators in multicultural and multilingual settings. By exploring teachers' experiences and challenges with professional development initiatives, this research will identify gaps in training, barriers to skill application, and possible improvements in education governance. Additionally, this study will explore how community leaders perceive the role of teacher development in shaping local education quality and whether current policies adequately equip teachers for student-centered and culturally responsive learning.

2) **To explore the specific adaptations to public management approaches regarding community engagement that are perceived by teachers and community leaders as necessary to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of educational programs in Yala.**

This objective focuses on how public management strategies for community engagement can be modified to better involve local stakeholders in education decision-making. While Thai education policies encourage decentralization and stakeholder participation, community leaders in Yala often perceive the decision-making process as top-down and disconnected from their needs. This study seeks to examine:

- How teachers and community leaders experience current engagement mechanisms (e.g., school committees, policy consultations, local education boards).
- What barriers prevent meaningful community participation in education governance.
- What specific adaptations to governance structures and stakeholder engagement approaches could foster more effective, inclusive, and locally driven education policies.

By addressing these objectives, this research aims to provide practical policy recommendations that enhance the role of public management in strengthening teacher development programs and community engagement—ultimately leading to more effective and culturally responsive education governance in Yala.

1.4 Benefits of Research

This research contributes to both theoretical and practical advancements in the fields of public management and education governance, with a particular focus on multicultural and politically sensitive regions like Yala, Thailand. The study offers valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and community leaders by highlighting how public management strategies in teacher professional development and community engagement influence educational outcomes. The benefits of this research are categorized as follows:

1.4.1 Theoretical Benefits

1) **Advancing Public Management Theory in Multicultural and Politically Sensitive Advancing Public Management Theory in Education Governance**

   This study contributes to the understanding of how public management frameworks apply to decentralized education systems in diverse cultural contexts. It expands the discussion on culturally responsive governance, offering insights into how local adaptations of public management policies can enhance their effectiveness.

2) **Bridging the Gap in Literature on Education Policy in Conflict-Affected and Multicultural Regions**

   Existing research on education policy in Thailand primarily focuses on national-level governance or student performance metrics. This study fills a critical research gap by providing qualitative insights into local stakeholder perceptions, ensuring a bottom-up perspective on education governance.

3) **Contributing to Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) in Public Administration**

By incorporating teachers' and community leaders' voices, the study reinforces participatory governance models in public administration literature. Findings from this research can be used to refine participatory approaches in public policy beyond education, particularly in multicultural and decentralized governance settings.

1.4.2 Practical Benefits

1) **Informing Policy Adaptations for Teacher Professional Development**

Insights from teachers will help policymakers refine training programs, ensuring that professional development initiatives are aligned with the linguistic, cultural, and contextual realities of Yala. The study identifies barriers that prevent effective skill application, offering solutions for enhanced teacher training programs that directly improve student learning outcomes.

2) **Enhancing Community Engagement Strategies in Education Governance**

Findings will guide policymakers in adapting stakeholder engagement mechanisms to better incorporate local voices in education policymaking. The research highlights specific governance modifications needed to foster trust and collaboration between educators, local leaders, and government officials.

3) Providing Actionable Recommendations for Local Education Authorities

Education administrators in Yala can use this research to design more effective school governance models, ensuring greater community participation. Findings will support localized policy interventions, ensuring that culturally inclusive education policies are effectively implemented.

4) Strengthening Multicultural and Inclusive Education Models

The study provides best practices for integrating multicultural perspectives into public management and education policy, benefiting not only Thailand but also other regions with diverse cultural demographics.