Journal of Education and Practice
ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper) ISSN 2222-288X (Online)
Vol.17, No.3, 2026

Enhancing Advisory Team Empowerment Mechanism to Propel Innovative Teacher Competencies in the Southern Border Education Sandbox

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate the development of teacher competencies in innovative learning management by implementing the INNOVATE TEAM model and the Valuable Advisory Team Empowerment (VATE) mechanism. The study was conducted in an Education Sandbox pilot school under a Local Administrative Organization in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand. Utilizing a Research and Development (R&D) methodology, the target group included 20 teachers from Prik Municipality School. The research instruments comprised the INNOVATE TEAM manual, a coaching skills curriculum, and an innovative competency assessment scale. Data analysis involved mean, standard deviation, and qualitative lesson-learned extraction.

The findings revealed that: 1) Following the intervention, teachers' innovative learning management competencies were significantly driven to a higher level, with the mean score rising from 14.20 (Fair) to 26.20 (Excellent). 2) The VATE mechanism successfully transformed the advisory team into professional coaches, creating a safe space within Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and organizational support systems. This effectively drove teachers' "Inner Drive," shifting their mindset from anxiety to creative courage. 3) Teachers were empowered to produce tangible learning innovations, including multicultural digital media and active learning strategies that effectively addressed the specific needs of the local context.

Keywords: Innovative Teacher Competency, Innovator, Education Sandbox, Southern Border Provinces

DOI: 10.7176/JEP/17-3-03
Publication date: March 28th 2026

1. Introduction

Amidst the currents of global digital transformation and the transition toward the Industry 4.0 era, educational systems worldwide are prioritizing innovation to develop learner competencies equipped for 21st-century challenges. In Thailand, the enactment of the Education Sandbox Act B.E. 2562 (2019) marked a significant turning point, granting educational institutions the autonomy to manage and design learning innovations that align with local contexts (Royal Gazette, 2019). This is particularly crucial for schools under Local Administrative Organizations , which maintain close community ties and possess the agility to respond to local educational needs.

However, driving innovation in the five southern border provinces Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, Satun, and four districts of Songkhla remains a challenge due to complex and fragile security issues and multicultural social dimensions. These unique contexts underscore that "Teacher's Innovative Learning Management Competency" is the vital heart of elevating educational quality. This competency extends beyond mere technological proficiency; it encompasses the ability to analyze student problems and create novel instructional media or methods that resonate with multicultural identities and ways of life, as well as the capacity to evaluate innovations for continuous learning development.

Despite supportive policies for Education Sandboxes, many teachers under LAOs remain trapped in traditional teaching paradigms and lack the competency to transition into a "Teacher as an Innovator." Past professional development has often relied on centralized training lacking practical classroom application, leaving teachers unable to integrate knowledge into effective innovative lesson plans (Lortie, 1975; Hargreaves, 1994). Consequently, internal supervision and Professional Learning Communities (PLC) that emphasize individual coaching have emerged as essential solutions (Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2002).

In response to these challenges, developing an "Advisory Team" is a critical mechanism to bridge this gap. This team serves through mentoring and coaching to unlock potential and drive teacher competencies in creating innovations that meet the specific needs of the five southern border provinces (Kram, 1985). This approach aligns with the INNOVATE TEAM model, which focuses on driving an "Inner Drive" coupled with organizational support and adult learning principles (Knowles, 1980). This study aims to extract lessons from the Advisory Team's operations at Prik Municipality School to analyze the tangible achievements in teachers' innovative learning management competencies, providing a vital roadmap for enhancing educational quality in Education Sandboxes and specific zones across Thailand.

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a Research and Development (R&D) design. This article specifically focuses on the results of the Implementation Phase of the teacher competency development model, with details as follows:

2.1 Target Group

The target group for this study consisted of 20 teachers who voluntarily participated in the innovative learning management competency development program. This group represented a diverse range of learning subject areas, ensuring a comprehensive application of the model across the curriculum.

2.2 Research Instruments

The instruments utilized in this research included:

1. The INNOVATE TEAM Model Implementation Manual: A comprehensive guide for executing the development process.
2. Coaching Skills Training Curriculum: Designed to enhance the mentoring and coaching capabilities of the advisory team.
3. Advisory Team Action Calendar: A structured schedule for systematic supervision and support.
4. Innovative Learning Management Competency Assessment Form: A tool used to measure teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding pedagogical innovation.

2.3 Development Procedures via the INNOVATE TEAM Model Integrated with the PDCA Cycle

The researcher drove the development of teacher competencies through three core driving systems: Flexible Development, Advisory Team, and Monitoring & Reflective. The central engine of this process is the VATE (Valuable Advisory Team Empowerment) mechanism, which shifts the traditional supervisory role toward becoming a "Developmental Coach." This mechanism was integrated with the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) quality cycle as follows:

1. Planning Stage (Plan - P): Building Foundations and Support Systems This stage focuses on structural and psychological readiness through the following mechanisms:

- Cultivating Inner Drive (I): The advisory team and administrators collaborate to instill an "innovative teacher" mindset, ensuring that teachers in these specific areas develop commitment and motivation from within.
- Establishing the Advisory System via VATE (O - Organizational Support): Administrators provide resources and budget while initiating the early phases of the VATE Process. This includes establishing a flexible development system (2.1), forming an expert advisory team (2.2), and designing a team-based operational system (2.3) to define roles and shared Team Goals.

2. Implementation Stage (Do - D): Nurturing Skills and Driving Innovation The model is put into practice to enhance teacher competencies through proactive guidance:

- Nurturing Skills (N): Developing innovation skills via Just-in-time Learning to solve real-world problems in LAO schools, with the advisory team driving systemic skill development for members (2.4).
- Driving through Safe Networks (N - Networking Through PLC): Utilizing PLCs as an operational base where the advisory team acts as mentors and coaches. This ensures the PLC is a creative and safe space, aligned with the principles of collective empowerment (2.5).
- Trial & Application of Technology: Teachers implement their innovations in multicultural classrooms, while the advisory team reinforces Inspiration & Confidence, encouraging them to embrace new pedagogical experiments.

3. Evaluation Stage (Check - C): Systemic Monitoring and Reflection The Monitoring & Reflective System serves as the primary mechanism for quality control:

- Supervision by VATE: The advisory team conducts continuous field visits (2.6) to ensure innovations meet established standards, utilizing performance metrics and observation logs to gather data from real classroom experiences.
- Collaborative Capacity Building: Reflective activities are organized within the advisory team and teacher groups to evaluate the alignment of innovations with local needs and to promptly adjust strategies.

4. Improvement and Development Stage (Act - A): Sustainability and Scalability This stage aims to transform temporary successes into a lasting organizational culture:
- Summarizing Best Practices: Utilizing feedback to improve innovation efficiency and sharing body of knowledge across school networks.
- Structural Sustainability: Executing the final stage of the VATE Process (2.7) by integrating the advisory team into the school's formal personnel development structure and establishing an Inter-school Mentor Network. This allows coached teachers to transition into mentors for the next generation, effectively driving long-term professional growth.

3. Research Results

The implementation of the INNOVATE TEAM model to develop innovative learning management competencies at the Education Sandbox pilot school (Prik Municipality School) yielded the following significant findings:

3.1 Teacher Competency Development (Quantitative Results)

A comparison of teacher competencies before and after participating in the development process driven by the model revealed significant improvement, as detailed in Table 1:

Table 1. Comparison of Innovative Learning Management Competency Scores (n=20)

Assessment Period	Full Score	Mean	S.D.	Competency Level
Pre-development	30	14.20	1.32	Fair
Post-development	30	26.20	0.89	Excellent

Table 1 indicates that after undergoing the development process through the INNOVATE TEAM model, teachers' competencies were significantly higher than before the intervention. The mean score increased by 12.00 points, driven by the Just-in-time Learning delivery mechanism and continuous guidance from the advisory team.

3.2 Outcomes of the VATE Mechanism and Support Systems (Qualitative Results)

Observations and lesson extraction through the Reflective System revealed key findings according to the driving systems:

1. Success of the Flexible Development System (INNOVATE):
   - Inner Drive (I): Teachers exhibited increased commitment and a positive mindset, shifting from "anxiety" to "creative courage" in developing innovations to solve real classroom problems.
   - Networking (N): The PLC network became a "safe space" where teachers sincerely exchanged both failures and successes, bolstered by full Organizational Support (resources and policy) from administrators.
2. Effectiveness of the VATE Mechanism (Advisory Team Empowerment):
   - The advisory team successfully transitioned into "Developmental Coaches" with clear roles, providing powerful guidance for designing community-based innovations within the unique context of the Southern Border Provinces.
   - The Monitoring & Reflective process enabled teachers to identify flaws and improve their work promptly, resulting in innovations characterized by Originality and Value-added educational impact.

3.3 Innovative Learning Management Outputs

Driven by the INNOVATE TEAM model, the target group produced tangible innovations to address practical issues, such as:

- Instructional Media Innovation: Application of digital technology and bilingual media tailored for multicultural learners.
- Methodological Innovation: Active Learning models integrated with local wisdom.
- Assessment Innovation: Authentic competency-based assessment tools that reduced workload while clearly reflecting learner outcomes.

4. Conclusion

The research on developing teacher competencies in innovative learning management through the INNOVATE TEAM model at Prik Municipality School—an Education Sandbox pilot school—can be summarized into three key areas as follows:

4.1 Elevation of Teacher Competencies (Quantitative Results)
The results of the model's implementation revealed that teachers' innovative learning management competencies increased with statistical significance at the .05 level, with details as follows:

- Overall Competency Level: The mean score rose from 14.20 (Fair) during the pre-development phase to 26.20 (Excellent) in the post-development phase, out of a total score of 30.
- Specific Developmental Areas: Teachers exhibited prominent growth in "Innovation Construction Skills" and "Commitment and Inner Drive." This success was a direct result of the nurturing process driven by continuous advisory and guidance mechanisms.

4.2 Achievements of the Three Core Driving Systems
The success of the model stemmed from the synergistic integration of the following operational processes:

- Flexible Development System (INNOVATE): This system effectively drove the "Inner Drive" of teachers, transforming their mindsets into "Teacher-Innovators." By emphasizing Just-in-Time Learning to address real-world challenges in Local Administrative Organization (LAO) schools, it fostered innovations characterized by Originality and educational Value-added.
- Advisory Team System (VATE): The VATE mechanism served as the "beating heart" of the Empowerment process, successfully transitioning advisory teams into professional coaches. By establishing a robust Team Foundation, it provided teachers with a sense of psychological safety and confidence to create pedagogical innovations.
- Monitoring & Reflective System: A systematic cycle of Reflection based on real-world experiences was established. This enabled teachers to continuously refine and drive the quality of their innovations toward maximum Efficiency

4.3 Innovative Outputs and Qualitative Outcomes

- Tangible Innovations: Teachers produced a diverse range of learning innovations, including multicultural digital media and Active Learning strategies tailored to the unique context of the five Southern Border Provinces.
- Learning Culture (Networking through PLC): A sustainable Professional Learning Community (PLC) was established. Supported by strong Organizational Support from administrators, the PLC evolved from a mere meeting group into a genuine mechanism for quality management and knowledge transfer.
- Systemic Sustainability: The research established a structure for mentor succession and an Inter-school Mentor Network. This ensures the continuity of innovative competency development at the network level, effectively driving long-term educational growth.

5. Discussion

The implementation of the INNOVATE TEAM model to develop teachers' innovative learning management competencies yields several critical points for discussion, highlighting the systemic mechanisms of its success.

First, the leap in teacher competency—from a "Fair" to an "Excellent" level—is fundamentally driven by the cultivation of Inner Drive (I). This serves as the attitudinal foundation prior to skill development. Particularly within the complex and challenging context of the five Southern Border Education Sandboxes, instilling self-confidence and a positive mindset allows teachers to recognize the value of their role as "Teacher-Innovators." This realization drives a sustainable commitment to solving classroom problems. This finding aligns with Herzberg's Motivation Theory (1959), which identifies achievement and recognition as key motivators for individuals to reach their maximum potential. It also resonates with Bandura's Self-Efficacy theory (1997), which asserts that confidence in one's abilities is a primary force in driving individuals to achieve difficult goals.

The "beating heart" of this success is the advisory team system under the VATE (Valuable Advisory Team Empowerment) mechanism. This mechanism represents a shift in supervisory culture from authoritarian oversight to proactive, friendly guidance. By focusing on Empowerment and creating a "psychological safe space" for learning, the advisory team reduces teachers' anxiety when experimenting with new ideas. This environment encourages teachers to create innovations characterized by Originality and high Value-added. This phenomenon can be explained by Vygotsky's Scaffolding concept (1978), which emphasizes providing

appropriate support during the development of new skills. It also supports Vicharn Panich's (2012) assertion that a teacher's most powerful learning occurs through continuous practice and reflection with a mentor.

Furthermore, this success is bolstered by the Flexible Development system, which focuses on Just-in-time Learning and Nurturing Skills (N) to address real-world local problems. This approach allows teachers to witness empirical success quickly, aligning with Knowles' Adult Learning Principles (1980), which state that adults learn best when the content is immediately applicable to real-life problem-solving. This entire process is forged through Networking Through PLC, which receives robust Organizational Support from school administrators in terms of resources, time, and policy.

Ultimately, the collective power generated through the teamwork mechanism of the INNOVATE TEAM model has created "Professional Capital." This capital is not limited to individuals but resides within the strength of the school's learning ecosystem. This is consistent with the framework of Hargreaves & Fullan (2012), who argue that collective decision-making and group learning elevate educational standards in innovation zones toward efficiency and sustainability, even under contextual constraints. The integration of intrinsic motivation, a powerful advisory mechanism, and a flexible support system is, therefore, the essential factor that drives teacher competency toward becoming professional innovators in a clear and tangible manner.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations for Implementation

1. Policy and Organizational Culture: School administrators should proactively drive the Organizational Support (O) component by allocating time and budgetary resources that facilitate innovation. Creating an atmosphere of trust that allows teachers to conduct Trials is essential to sustainably stimulate their Inner Drive.
2. Supervision and Guidance: The VATE mechanism should be developed into a standard operating procedure for advisory teams. This involves shifting roles from traditional oversight to Empowerment through collaborative coaching in safe spaces, thereby elevating teacher competencies toward becoming innovators at both the school and network levels.
3. Personnel Development: Teacher training models should transition toward Flexible Development that emphasizes Just-in-time Learning. The focus should be on Nurturing Skills (N) that align with the specific context of the Education Sandbox, rather than relying on centralized, theory-based training.

6.2 Recommendations for Future Research

1. Empirical Outcomes on Learners: Follow-up research should be conducted to systematically study the correlation between innovative teacher competencies under the INNOVATE TEAM model and the development of student achievement and essential skills within multicultural areas.
2. Digital Supervision Innovation: Research should explore the application of information technology to support the VATE mechanism through Virtual Coaching. This would enhance agility in monitoring and guiding teachers in remote areas.
3. Network Sustainability Assessment: Future studies should investigate models for mentor succession and the Inter-school Mentor Network to ensure the sustainability of the advisory system at the local level and to scale the model to schools in other Education Sandbox regions.

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