

Prathom Students' Perceptions of Arabic as a Foreign Language Learning in a Multicultural School

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Abstract

Arabic occupies a distinctive position among Muslim learners in Southern Thailand because it carries strong religious significance while remaining a foreign language outside everyday communication. This study explored Grade 5 *Prathom* students' perceptions of learning Arabic as a foreign language and examined how social and instructional mediation shaped their learning experiences through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. A qualitative case study was conducted at Chum Chon Ban Sako School, Narathiwat, Thailand, involving 20 students and one Arabic teacher. Data were collected over two months through five classroom observations, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and a supplementary closed-ended questionnaire. Data were analyzed using an interactive process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, supported by source and method triangulation. The findings revealed that students strongly valued Arabic because of its connection with the Qur'an, prayer, worship, and Islamic identity, but this positive perception coexisted with difficulties in pronunciation, vocabulary meaning, writing, sentence construction, and grammar. Repetitive memorization was associated with boredom and reduced engagement, whereas songs, picture cards, games, rewards, peer interaction, and *hiwar* were accompanied by more active classroom participation. These findings demonstrate that students' perceptions emerged through the interaction of religious meaning, multilingual experience, linguistic difficulty, and classroom mediation. Arabic instruction for young learners should therefore integrate its religious relevance with scaffolded, contextualized, interactive, and developmentally appropriate communicative activities.

Keywords: Arabic as a foreign language, Sociocultural theory, Student perceptions, Social mediation, Prathom students.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language learning, including Arabic, is a complex process that extends beyond linguistic knowledge to encompass cultural, psychological, and social dimensions. Conceptually, Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL) aims to develop communicative competence across the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—while enabling learners to engage with the sociocultural contexts in which Arabic is used and to develop intercultural awareness (Damsing & Che Haron, 2026). For non-Arabic-speaking learners, Arabic instruction therefore requires more than memorization of linguistic forms; it should provide meaningful and communicative learning experiences that are responsive to learners' social and cultural contexts.

This contextual orientation is particularly important in Thailand, where religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity shapes the educational environment. Although Muslims constitute a religious minority nationally, Muslim communities are highly concentrated in the southern provinces, particularly Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Within these communities, Arabic occupies a distinctive position because of its close association with Islamic identity, religious practices, and access to Islamic texts. At the same time, Arabic remains a foreign language rather than a language of everyday communication. Muslim students in Southern Thailand may use Standard Thai, Pattani Malay, or a combination of languages in their daily interactions, while Standard Thai remains the principal language of formal education under the national curriculum (Ministry of Education Thailand, 2008). Arabic is commonly taught in Islamic private schools, pondok institutions, and government schools serving predominantly Muslim communities, often as part of Islamic religious education and as a means of accessing the Qur'an and other Islamic knowledge. Consequently, Arabic learning in Southern Thailand takes place within a complex multilingual environment shaped simultaneously by national language policy, local linguistic practices, and religious identity.

Such complexity has particular implications for foreign language learning at the elementary (Prathom) level, where instruction needs to be responsive to learners' linguistic backgrounds, cultural identities, and developmental characteristics. Chum Chon Ban Sako School in Sri Sakhon, Narathiwat, represents this educational context. The school serves 690 students, all of whom are Muslim, while operating within Thailand's broader multicultural and multilingual society. In this setting, Arabic instruction involves not only linguistic and religious learning but also interaction between students' local experiences and the sociocultural meanings associated with the target language. This highlights the importance of culturally responsive and intercultural dimensions in language education (Baker, 2021). School learning data further indicate that Arabic learning outcomes at the Prathom level, particularly among Grade 5 students, have not yet reached the expected level. Understanding students' perceptions is therefore important because their beliefs, attitudes, and interests constitute important affective dimensions of foreign language learning and are closely related to learners' motivation and engagement (A'yun & Azzahra, 2026).

Several interconnected pedagogical challenges may shape these learning experiences. First, Arabic instruction continues to rely substantially on traditional practices such as memorization, providing relatively limited opportunities for authentic and engaging communication. Second, instructional materials are not always sufficiently connected to students' everyday lives and local Thai cultural contexts, potentially limiting the perceived relevance of Arabic learning. Third, the school faces resource-related constraints, including limited instructional media and substantial teacher workloads (Chum Chon Ban Sako School, 2025). Together, these conditions suggest that students' perceptions of Arabic cannot be understood solely as individual preferences but should be examined in relation to the social interactions, instructional practices, and cultural resources through which learning takes place.

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory provides an appropriate theoretical lens for examining these processes. From this perspective, learning develops through socially mediated interaction, with language, symbols, instructional materials, and other cultural tools mediating learners' cognitive development. In the Arabic classroom, teachers, peers, learning materials, media, and instructional activities can function as mediational resources through which students construct their understanding and experiences of the target language. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) further emphasizes the role of guidance and social interaction in enabling learners to progress beyond what they can accomplish independently. Accordingly, students' perceptions of Arabic learning may be shaped by the quality of classroom mediation: meaningful interactions, relevant materials, and appropriate guidance may support engagement, whereas limited or poorly contextualized mediation may constrain students' learning experiences. This theoretical perspective enables students' perceptions to be examined not merely as individual attitudes but as experiences constructed within a particular social and instructional environment.

Previous studies provide important insights into Arabic and foreign language learning but also reveal several gaps. Wanaeloh (2024) examined multicultural education in Thailand primarily from broader policy and curriculum perspectives, leaving the specific practices of Arabic learning at the elementary level comparatively underexplored. Brilliant et al. (2025) developed contextualized Arabic instructional materials in Indonesia, but their findings were generated in a different sociolinguistic environment and therefore do not directly address the multilingual dynamics of Southern Thailand, including the presence of Pattani Malay. Research has also demonstrated the importance of understanding students' perceptions (Parris et al., 2018), language anxiety as a potential barrier to Arabic learning (Abror & Djamilah, 2024), and the potential of cultural content and digital storytelling to support language-learning engagement (Miliutina et al., 2025). Damsing and Che Haron (2026) further highlighted cognitive and affective dimensions in Arabic reading instruction. Collectively, these studies demonstrate the importance of learner perceptions, cultural context, affective experiences, and instructional mediation, but they provide limited understanding of how these elements interact within the everyday Arabic-learning experiences of young learners in Muslim communities in Southern Thailand.

A more specific gap therefore concerns the limited examination of Grade 5 Prathom students' perceptions of Arabic as a foreign language through a sociocultural perspective that explicitly considers classroom mediation and the documented conditions of a particular school context.

Existing studies have generally addressed multicultural education, Arabic instructional materials, learner perceptions, or specific affective and instructional factors separately. Less attention has been given to how teachers, peers, instructional materials, classroom activities, and available learning resources collectively mediate young learners' perceptions of Arabic within the multilingual and Muslim sociocultural environment of Southern Thailand. Addressing this gap is important for generating context-sensitive evidence rather than assuming that findings from other national, linguistic, or educational settings can be directly transferred to this population.

Accordingly, this study aims to (1) explore Grade 5 Prathom students' perceptions of learning Arabic as a foreign language within a multicultural Muslim school context and (2) examine how social interactions and mediational tools in the classroom shape these perceptions through the lens of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. The study contributes theoretically by extending the application of sociocultural perspectives to Arabic foreign language learning among young learners in a distinctive Southeast Asian context. Methodologically, it employs a context-sensitive case study approach that connects students' perceptions with documented classroom and school conditions. Practically, the findings are expected to provide evidence for teachers and schools in designing Arabic instructional strategies, materials, and activities that are more meaningful, engaging, culturally responsive, and feasible within the resources available at the school.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore Grade 5 Prathom students' perceptions of learning Arabic as a foreign language within a multicultural Muslim school context. A case study was considered appropriate because the research sought an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and meaning-making within a bounded educational setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was conducted at Chum Chon Ban Sako School, Sri Sakhon, Narathiwat, Thailand, over two months from June to July 2025. The site was purposively selected because it offered structured Arabic language instruction within the distinctive multilingual and sociocultural environment of a Muslim community in Southern Thailand. Participants comprised 20 Grade 5 Prathom students and one Arabic language teacher. The students provided information about their learning experiences, perceptions, difficulties, and classroom engagement, while the teacher provided complementary perspectives on pedagogical considerations, instructional strategies, and the use of learning media.

Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and a closed-ended questionnaire. Classroom observations were conducted across five Arabic lessons and focused on teacher-student interactions, student responses and participation, instructional media, and forms of learning support occurring during instruction. Interviews with students and the Arabic teacher explored their experiences, perceptions, difficulties, and interpretations of Arabic learning. Relevant instructional documents, including teaching materials, lesson plans, and assessment records, were examined to provide contextual evidence regarding the relationship between planned and enacted instruction. In addition, a closed-ended questionnaire was administered to the 20 students as supplementary descriptive data to map general tendencies in their perceptions. The questionnaire was not used as a stand-alone quantitative measure or for inferential analysis. Data-collection instruments consisted of observation and interview protocols, a document-analysis guide, and a questionnaire developed with reference to students' perceptions and sociocultural mediation.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). Interview and observational data were transcribed and initially coded according to recurring meanings and patterns. The codes were subsequently organized into themes representing students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral perceptions as well as forms of sociocultural mediation involving teachers, peers, language, symbols, instructional media, and classroom activities. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns in students' perceptions, while classroom-interaction data were examined to understand how communication and instructional support mediated students' learning experiences. Documentary evidence was used to contextualize and compare planned instruction with classroom

practices. Interpretation was subsequently informed by Vygotsky's sociocultural framework while remaining grounded in patterns emerging from the empirical data.

The trustworthiness of the findings was strengthened through source and method triangulation (Moleong, 2017). Source triangulation involved comparing evidence obtained from students, the Arabic teacher, and instructional documents, whereas method triangulation compared findings across observations, interviews, questionnaire responses, and document analysis. Rather than treating theory as an independent form of data triangulation, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory was used as an interpretive framework for examining the empirical themes. Field notes and analytic memos were maintained throughout data collection and analysis to document coding decisions, emerging interpretations, and the reasoning underlying analytical decisions. These procedures provided an audit trail and helped ensure that the final interpretations remained traceable to the empirical evidence.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

The findings are organized according to the interactive qualitative analysis process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Rather than presenting the results according to individual data-collection instruments, the analysis was structured around the two research focuses: Grade 5 *Prathom* students' perceptions of learning Arabic as a foreign language and the social and cultural mediation processes associated with those perceptions. Evidence from classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, the supplementary questionnaire, and school documents was compared across sources to identify recurring and contrasting patterns.

1. Data Condensation: Emerging Patterns of Students' Perceptions

Data condensation involved selecting, coding, comparing, and organizing evidence from the different data sources into recurring patterns. Four major themes emerged. First, students perceived Arabic as important primarily because of its religious significance, particularly its connection with the Qur'an, prayer, worship, and Islamic learning. Second, this positive cognitive perception did not always correspond to positive affective experiences. Some students reported boredom, confusion, or limited interest when lessons relied heavily on vocabulary memorization and repetitive activities. Third, students experienced linguistic difficulties involving pronunciation, vocabulary meaning, writing, sentence construction, and grammar. Fourth, students demonstrated more positive behavioral and affective responses when instruction incorporated songs, pictures, games, rewards, question-and-answer activities, *hiwar* practice, and collaborative tasks.

These patterns reveal an important distinction between the value students attributed to Arabic and their experience of learning it. Students did not generally perceive Arabic as unimportant; instead, they recognized its religious relevance while responding differently to the ways in which it was taught. The central issue emerging from the data was therefore not a lack of appreciation for Arabic itself, but a gap between its strong symbolic-religious value and the extent to which classroom instruction transformed that value into sustained engagement. This distinction became particularly visible when students' responses were compared across lessons employing different forms of instructional mediation.

2. Thematic Display of the Findings

Cross-source analysis generated six interconnected areas: cognitive perception, affective perception, behavioral engagement, linguistic difficulties, social mediation, and instructional limitations. Table 1 summarizes the principal evidence and its descriptive meaning.

Table 1. Thematic Summary of Findings Across Data Sources

Focus	Main Finding	Data Sources	Descriptive Meaning
Cognitive perception	Arabic was considered important because of its connection with the Qur'an, prayer, worship, and Islamic education	Interviews, questionnaire	Students attributed strong religious value to learning Arabic

Affective perception	Students responded positively to songs, pictures, games, and rewards but reported boredom when lessons relied heavily on memorization	Observations, interviews, questionnaire	Emotional responses varied according to classroom learning experiences
Behavioral engagement	Participation was more visible during quizzes, group activities, <i>hiwar</i> , and simple challenges	Observations, interviews	Interactive activities were accompanied by greater observable participation
Linguistic difficulties	Students reported difficulties with pronunciation, vocabulary meaning, writing, sentence construction, and grammar	Interviews, questionnaire	Difficulties involved both understanding and producing Arabic
Social mediation	Teachers, peers, songs, picture cards, rewards, games, and <i>hiwar</i> supported classroom learning activities	Observations, interviews	Learning experiences were mediated through social interaction and instructional tools
Instructional limitations	Media were largely limited to songs and picture cards, and interactive activities were not consistently employed	Observations, interviews	Opportunities for varied and sustained mediation remained limited

Students' Cognitive and Religious Perceptions of Arabic

A prominent finding was the strong religious meaning students attached to Arabic. Students commonly associated learning Arabic with understanding the Qur'an, reciting prayers, participating in worship, and acquiring Islamic knowledge. One student explained, "It is important because it helps me read prayers and the Qur'an." This response illustrates that students' perceived value of Arabic was grounded primarily in its religious function rather than in its use as an everyday communicative language. The school context reinforced this perception: all students at Chum Chon Ban Sako School were Muslim, while Arabic occupied an important position in religious learning despite not being the language of daily communication.

The findings therefore reveal a distinction between religious relevance and communicative familiarity. Arabic was meaningful to students because of its religious status, yet it remained linguistically distant from the languages used in their everyday environment. Students lived within a multilingual context dominated more directly by Thai and local language practices. Consequently, recognizing the importance of Arabic did not necessarily mean that students found its vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical structures, or written forms easy to learn.

Affective Responses and Classroom Engagement

Students' affective responses varied noticeably according to the form of classroom activity. Observations across the lessons showed that students appeared more interested when vocabulary songs and picture cards were introduced, although some students remained relatively passive. Participation became more visible when these resources were combined with questions and answers, quizzes, rewards, *hiwar* practice, and group games. In contrast, when instruction returned to whole-class repetition and memorization, some students appeared less focused and showed signs of boredom. Thus, engagement was not constant across the observed lessons but varied alongside changes in instructional activity.

Interview data provided further evidence of this contrast. While students acknowledged the importance of Arabic, one student stated, "I do not really like it because the lesson is mostly memorization." Other students expressed preferences for games, videos, songs, stories, paired conversations, and simple drama activities. These responses sharpen the distinction identified in the first theme: positive perceptions of the value of Arabic coexisted with less positive perceptions of particular learning experiences. Students' responses therefore suggest that the affective dimension of their perceptions was closely associated with how opportunities for participation and interaction were organized in the classroom.

Linguistic Difficulties Experienced by Students

The findings also identified several recurring linguistic difficulties. Students reported problems with pronunciation, understanding vocabulary meanings, writing Arabic,

constructing sentences, and understanding grammatical forms. These difficulties indicate that the challenges were not confined to vocabulary memorization but occurred across receptive and productive aspects of learning Arabic. The supplementary questionnaire supported the interview findings, particularly regarding difficulties in understanding Arabic vocabulary.

Importantly, the classroom evidence suggested that linguistic difficulty and instructional experience were interconnected. When unfamiliar vocabulary and language forms were presented predominantly through repetition, students had fewer opportunities to encounter them in meaningful communicative contexts. By contrast, picture cards, dialogue practice, questions and answers, and peer activities provided additional contextual or interpersonal support for processing the language. The findings do not establish that these activities reduced linguistic difficulty in a causal sense, but they show that students displayed different patterns of participation when linguistic content was mediated through more interactive activities.

Social and Cultural Mediation in the Arabic Classroom

The second research focus concerned how classroom mediation was associated with students' perceptions. Observations and interviews identified several mediational resources, including the teacher, peers, language, songs, picture cards, rewards, games, question-and-answer exchanges, and *hiwar*. These resources performed different functions. The teacher provided explanations, directions, questions, and corrective assistance; peers provided opportunities for collaborative participation; and instructional media helped represent vocabulary or stimulate classroom responses. *Hiwar* and group activities additionally created opportunities for students to use Arabic through interaction rather than solely through individual memorization.

This pattern is particularly important when viewed through the study's sociocultural lens. Mediation was not limited to physical media such as cards or pictures; it also occurred through interpersonal interaction and structured classroom activity. Students' learning experiences were therefore situated within a network of relationships among learner-teacher, learner-peer, learner-language, and learner-instructional tool. However, these forms of mediation were not consistently present across all observed activities. When interactive support was reduced and lessons became dominated by repetitive memorization, student participation also appeared less active. The data thus identify the quality and variation of classroom mediation as an important contextual feature associated with students' experiences of Arabic learning.

3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Cross-verification of observations, interviews, questionnaire responses, and school documents resulted in three central findings. First, students' perceptions were multidimensional rather than uniformly positive or negative. Arabic held strong religious significance for students, but positive perceptions of its importance did not automatically translate into enjoyment of classroom learning. Students could simultaneously value Arabic for religious purposes and experience boredom or difficulty when instruction was dominated by memorization.

Second, students' perceptions and engagement were closely associated with the forms of mediation available during instruction. Greater observable participation accompanied activities involving teachers and peers, songs, picture cards, rewards, games, questions and answers, and *hiwar*, whereas more repetitive teacher-directed activities were accompanied by greater passivity among some students. These findings show that social interaction and instructional tools were important components of students' classroom experiences, although the qualitative case-study design does not establish causal effects.

Third, students' difficulties reflected an interaction between the demands of Arabic as a foreign language and the conditions under which it was learned. Pronunciation, vocabulary meaning, writing, sentence construction, and grammar emerged as recurring difficulties, while the limited and inconsistent use of varied instructional mediation restricted opportunities to encounter Arabic through meaningful use. Taken together, the findings suggest a need to move beyond predominantly vocabulary-oriented memorization toward gradually scaffolded,

contextualized, and communicative activities in which Grade 5 Prathom students can encounter and use Arabic through meaningful classroom interaction.

B. Discussion

The findings reveal a distinctive dual positioning of Arabic in the learning experiences of Grade 5 Prathom students. On the one hand, Arabic was highly valued because of its association with the Qur'an, prayer, worship, and Islamic identity. On the other hand, it was experienced as a foreign language that differed from the languages students encountered in everyday communication and presented difficulties in pronunciation, vocabulary, writing, sentence construction, and grammar. This distinction helps explain why students could simultaneously recognize the importance of Arabic while reporting boredom, confusion, or reduced engagement during particular classroom activities. The findings therefore suggest that perceived value and perceived learning experience constitute related but distinct dimensions of students' perceptions. Religious significance provided a meaningful reason for learning Arabic, but this symbolic value alone did not ensure that students experienced the learning process as engaging or accessible.

This pattern becomes more comprehensible through Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, which conceptualizes learning as a socially mediated process rather than an exclusively individual cognitive activity. In the observed classroom, mediation occurred through multiple resources, including the teacher, peers, instructional language, songs, picture cards, rewards, games, and hiwar activities. Students displayed greater willingness to respond, pronounce unfamiliar vocabulary, participate in activities, and practice simple dialogues when these forms of mediation were incorporated into instruction. In contrast, greater passivity and reduced attention were observed when activities relied predominantly on repetitive memorization. These patterns do not establish a causal relationship between particular strategies and student engagement; rather, they demonstrate that different forms of classroom mediation were accompanied by different patterns of participation and affective response. Students' perceptions of Arabic learning were thus embedded in the social and instructional conditions through which they encountered the language.

The role of teacher support can be further interpreted through the concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding. From this perspective, instructional assistance is particularly valuable when it enables learners to perform language-related tasks that would be difficult to accomplish independently. The present findings showed several forms of such assistance: the teacher provided models, slowed down explanations, repeated unfamiliar forms, used songs and picture cards, and guided students through hiwar practice. These findings correspond with Oktavera et al. (2025), who emphasized the importance of scaffolding in Arabic as a Foreign Language instruction for bridging the distance between learners' current abilities and more advanced language performance. However, the findings also suggest that scaffolding should not be equated with repetition alone. When repeated practice becomes predictable and disconnected from meaningful language use, instructional support may provide fewer opportunities for active participation. For young learners, scaffolding may therefore need to progress from modeling and guided repetition toward supported practice, peer interaction, and increasingly independent use of simple Arabic expressions.

This issue is particularly evident in vocabulary instruction. Memorization remained a prominent strategy in the observed lessons and should not necessarily be regarded as pedagogically inappropriate, especially for beginning learners who require a foundational repertoire of mufradat. The problem arises when memorization becomes the endpoint of instruction rather than an initial stage leading to meaningful language use. Some students reported forgetting vocabulary, becoming bored with repeated memorization, or having difficulty understanding how memorized words were used. Fikri et al. (2025) similarly argued that Arabic instruction that emphasizes linguistic forms without sufficient contextualization can limit learners' ability to apply the language meaningfully. The pedagogical implication is therefore not to eliminate memorization but to embed vocabulary learning within a progression from recognition to contextualized use. Newly introduced vocabulary can first be supported through

pictures, objects, gestures, or songs and subsequently incorporated into simple sentences, short dialogues, stories, role-play, and collaborative tasks.

Such a progression is consistent with the communicative orientation emphasized by Qorin et al. (2025), who highlighted the importance of communicative Arabic instructional materials that enable learners to move beyond knowledge of linguistic elements toward their use in meaningful situations. This principle is particularly relevant for elementary learners because communicative practice does not need to involve complex language production. At the Prathom level, meaningful communication may consist of recognizing familiar expressions, responding to simple questions, introducing oneself, naming objects, exchanging short utterances, or performing brief dialogues with peers. In this sense, the transition from memorization to communication should be understood as a developmentally appropriate continuum, rather than a complete replacement of vocabulary practice with unrestricted communication.

Instructional media constituted another important form of mediation. Students responded positively to songs and picture cards, but the findings also showed that repeated use of the same media did not consistently sustain their interest. Students expressed preferences for a broader range of resources, including videos, audio materials, stories, songs, games, and other visual presentations. This finding is consistent with Al Husna et al. (2025), who demonstrated the potential of interactive and multimedia materials to make Arabic instruction more engaging. From a sociocultural perspective, however, the significance of media extends beyond their capacity to attract attention. Media function as cultural and representational tools through which unfamiliar linguistic forms can be connected to concrete meanings and experiences. A picture can associate a new word with a recognizable object, audio can provide a pronunciation model, and video or storytelling can situate vocabulary and expressions within an observable communicative context. The pedagogical value of media therefore depends not simply on technological variety but on how effectively they mediate students' understanding and participation.

Peer interaction provides a further layer of mediation. Students showed more visible participation during group work, paired hiwar, quizzes, and games than during predominantly teacher-directed repetition. Within a sociocultural framework, peers can function as learning resources when activities allow students to observe, imitate, negotiate, practice, and support one another. This is especially relevant for young foreign-language learners who may hesitate to produce unfamiliar sounds or expressions individually in front of the entire class. Structured pair and group activities can provide smaller and potentially less intimidating spaces for language practice. Nevertheless, peer interaction should not be assumed to be inherently productive; its educational value depends on task structure, teacher guidance, and opportunities for meaningful participation. For this reason, collaborative activities should be deliberately organized around achievable language tasks rather than used merely to create classroom activity.

Rewards and teacher praise also appeared alongside more active student responses, particularly when students attempted difficult pronunciation or participated in classroom tasks. For elementary learners, such responses may provide affective support and encourage willingness to participate. However, rewards should function as supportive elements rather than become the primary reason for engaging with Arabic. A more sustainable pedagogical orientation would connect encouragement with students' progress, effort, successful communication, and increasing independence. In this way, affective support can complement rather than substitute for meaningful instructional mediation.

Taken together, these findings extend the application of Sociocultural Theory to TAFL by demonstrating that students' perceptions cannot be adequately understood as fixed individual attitudes toward Arabic. Instead, they were situated at the intersection of religious meaning, multilingual experience, linguistic difficulty, social interaction, and pedagogical mediation. This is particularly significant in the context of Southern Thailand. Arabic carries strong religious and symbolic value for Muslim students, while their everyday linguistic environment is shaped more directly by Thai and local language practices. Arabic learning therefore involves movement between a language that is culturally and religiously meaningful and one that remains relatively unfamiliar as a medium of everyday communication. The contribution of this study lies in showing

how this apparent tension is negotiated within the concrete practices of an elementary Arabic classroom.

The findings consequently have practical implications for Arabic instruction at Chum Chon Ban Sako School and comparable multilingual Muslim educational settings. Instruction may begin with familiar and religiously meaningful vocabulary but should progressively connect that vocabulary to concrete objects, visual representations, pronunciation models, simple sentences, short hiwar, stories, games, and structured peer interaction. Rather than relying on a single medium or strategy, teachers can combine multiple forms of mediation according to the linguistic demands of the task and students' developmental level. Such an approach preserves the religious significance that students already associate with Arabic while expanding opportunities to experience the language as something that can be understood, practiced, and used.

The study also requires interpretation within its methodological boundaries. The findings were generated from a qualitative case study involving 20 Grade 5 students and one Arabic teacher at a single school during a two-month period. They therefore provide a contextually grounded account rather than evidence intended for statistical generalization to Prathom students across Southern Thailand. Furthermore, the supplementary questionnaire was used to support qualitative patterns rather than to establish population-level tendencies or causal relationships. Future research could examine similar processes across schools with different linguistic and institutional characteristics, incorporate longitudinal classroom observations, and investigate how particular forms of scaffolding and communicative mediation relate to changes in students' language use over time.

Overall, the study indicates that the central pedagogical issue is not simply whether students value Arabic or whether they find it difficult, but how its existing religious significance can be transformed into meaningful learning experiences through effective mediation. In this multicultural and multilingual Muslim school context, students' perceptions emerged through the interaction between the symbolic value of Arabic and the concrete ways in which the language was encountered in the classroom. Strengthening Arabic learning at the Prathom level therefore requires a shift from predominantly repetitive vocabulary instruction toward scaffolded, contextualized, interactive, and developmentally appropriate language use, while retaining the religious meanings that make Arabic personally and culturally significant to the learners.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study provides a contextually grounded understanding of Grade 5 Prathom students' perceptions of learning Arabic as a foreign language at Chum Chon Ban Sako School, Southern Thailand. The findings reveal that students' perceptions were multidimensional. Arabic was strongly valued because of its association with the Qur'an, prayer, worship, and Islamic identity, yet its religious significance did not automatically translate into positive learning experiences. Students reported difficulties with pronunciation, vocabulary meaning, writing, sentence construction, and grammar, while repetitive memorization was associated with boredom and reduced classroom engagement. In contrast, more active participation was observed when learning involved songs, picture cards, games, rewards, peer interaction, and hiwar practice. Viewed through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, these findings highlight the importance of teachers, peers, instructional media, language, and classroom activities as mediational resources connecting students with otherwise unfamiliar linguistic forms. The findings therefore suggest that Arabic instruction at the Prathom level should move beyond predominantly repetitive vocabulary memorization toward scaffolded, contextualized, communicative, and developmentally appropriate language use. The religious significance already attached to Arabic can serve as a meaningful foundation, but it needs to be supported by varied social and pedagogical mediation that enables students to experience the language through meaningful participation. Given the single-school case study involving 20 students and one teacher, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific rather than statistically generalizable to Prathom learners across Southern Thailand.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Moh. Ali Gufron: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data Analysis, and Writing – Original Draft.

Eka Ramiati: Methodology, Validation, and Writing – Review & Editing.

Zidniyati: Supervision, Validation, and Writing – Review & Editing.

Rusme Samae: Investigation, Data Collection, and Data Curation.

Fathi Hidayah: Field Coordination, Data Collection, and Validation.

All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES

AI-assisted tools were used solely for language editing, proofreading, and improving the readability of the manuscript. All content was reviewed and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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