



Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Problems and Their Solution to Learning Arabic at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School, Thailand

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Abstract

Arabic plays an important role in Islamic education in Southern Thailand, particularly in Islamic schools where Arabic is essential for accessing Islamic religious knowledge. However, Arabic language learning at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School in Hat Yai, Songkhla, faces various linguistic and non-linguistic challenges that affect the learning process. This study aims to identify and analyze the linguistic and non-linguistic problems encountered in Arabic language learning and to formulate appropriate solutions. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation and were analyzed descriptively to identify the major problems and their underlying factors. The findings reveal that linguistic problems involve difficulties in Arabic phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Non-linguistic problems include limited opportunities to use Arabic in the learning environment, inadequate learning facilities, and variations in students' motivation, enthusiasm, and perseverance. The study finds that addressing these problems requires integrated efforts, including improving teaching strategies, strengthening students' motivation, providing greater opportunities for Arabic language practice, and developing a more supportive learning environment. These findings indicate that effective Arabic language learning depends on both students' linguistic competence and the broader educational context.

Keywords: Arabic learning; Linguistic problems; Non-linguistic problems; Islamic education.

مستخلص البحث

تؤدي اللغة العربية دوراً مهماً في التعليم الإسلامي في جنوب تايلاند، ولا سيما في المدارس الإسلامية التي تُعَدُّ اللغة العربية فيها وسيلة أساسية للوصول إلى المعرفة الدينية الإسلامية. ومع ذلك، تواجه عملية تعلّم اللغة العربية في مدرسة سونغسيرم ويتايا مولنيثي بمدينة هات ياي، في مقاطعة سونغكلا، عدداً من المشكلات اللغوية وغير اللغوية التي تؤثر في عملية التعلّم. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد المشكلات اللغوية وغير اللغوية التي تواجه تعلّم اللغة العربية وتحليلها، واقتراح الحلول المناسبة لمعالجتها. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي النوعي، وجمعت البيانات من خلال الملاحظة والمقابلات والوثائق، ثم حُلّلت البيانات تحليلًا وصفيًا للكشف عن أبرز المشكلات والعوامل الكامنة وراءها. وأظهرت النتائج أن المشكلات اللغوية تتمثل في صعوبات تتعلق بعلم الأصوات والصرف والنحو والدلالة إضافة إلى الصعوبات في تنمية مهارات الاستماع والكلام والقراءة والكتابة. أما المشكلات غير اللغوية فتتمثل في محدودية فرص استخدام اللغة العربية

في البيئة التعليمية، وقصور بعض التجهيزات التعليمية، وتفاوت مستويات الدافعية والحماس والمثابرة لدى الطلاب. وتوصلت الدراسة إلى أن معالجة هذه المشكلات تتطلب جهودًا متكاملة، من أبرزها تطوير استراتيجيات التدريس، وتعزيز دافعية الطلاب، وتوفير فرص أكبر لممارسة اللغة العربية، وتهيئة بيئة تعليمية أكثر دعمًا. وتؤكد هذه النتائج أن فاعلية تعلم اللغة العربية لا تعتمد على الكفاءة اللغوية للطلاب فحسب، بل تتأثر أيضًا بالسياق التعليمي والعوامل المحيطة بعملية التعلم.

كلمات المفتاحية: تعلم اللغة العربية؛ المشكلات اللغوية؛ المشكلات غير اللغوية؛ التعليم الإسلامي.

Introduction

Arabic has gained global recognition as an international language essential for religious, academic, and diplomatic communication. This distinctive status stems from the fact that the Qur'an, the Hadith of the Prophet, and classical scholarly works (*kutub turots*) covering various branches of Islamic knowledge were written in Arabic, making mastery of the language the primary gateway to understanding Islamic teachings directly from their original sources (Ahmadi & Awaluddin, 2024). Furthermore, proficiency in Arabic also opens channels of international communication in education, diplomacy, economics, and cultural exchange, positioning Arabic as one of the international languages with a strategic role in the cross-national development of Islamic education (Ahmadi & Awaluddin, 2024). Other studies emphasize that Arabic's distinctiveness lies not in its identity as an ethnic or regional language, but in its status as the language of religion, historically mastered by Muslim scholars across nations throughout the history of Islamic scholarship.

In the context of Southern Thailand, particularly in provinces such as Satun, Songkhla, Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani, Arabic serves as a vital tool for the Muslim minority to access Islamic knowledge while preserving their cultural and religious identity. The Malay Muslim community in the former Sultanate of Patani region has a long history as a minority group that has repeatedly faced pressure toward cultural assimilation, including policies restricting the use of the Malay language and identity in formal spheres since an era that emphasized a single, dominant Thai culture. Amid such pressures, Islamic educational institutions have continued to be maintained as centers of religious education and, simultaneously, as vehicles for preserving Malay-Muslim cultural identity (Rahman et al., 2024). The transformation of Islamic educational institutions in Patani-Southern Thailand, from a traditional pesantren pattern toward more modern institutions, forms part of the long-standing dynamics of the struggle for Malay-Muslim Patani identity (Fathurahman, 2014; Rasid et al., 2019).

Previous studies by Fahrurrozi (2014b) have categorized Arabic learning challenges into a broad framework of linguistic and non-linguistic problems, focusing on general pedagogical barriers across Southeast Asia. This two-category framework continues to be confirmed by more recent research: linguistic problems commonly include phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, while non-

linguistic problems include educational background, limited vocabulary, inadequate facilities, low motivation, language environment, and time allocation (Laubaha et al., 2022). A study of students at Madrasah Aliyah Amalia Medan likewise confirms that low motivation, weak foundational mastery of Arabic, insufficiently varied teaching methods, and limited learning facilities are dominant inhibiting factors (Kaltsum, 2025). Nevertheless, much of the literature from 2020–2025, while acknowledging these barriers, tends to focus on Malay-speaking regions and has not given much attention to the specific intersection between linguistic friction and a Siamese-speaking environment.

What is already well established is that linguistic problems (phonology, syntax, and morphology) and non-linguistic factors (motivation and facilities) significantly hinder Arabic acquisition. Research on the interference of a learner's mother tongue on Arabic speaking skills shows that linguistic interference creates difficulties simultaneously at the levels of pronunciation, grammatical structure, and vocabulary choice, which in turn leads to communication errors. However, what remains largely unexplored is how these challenges manifest and interact specifically within modernizing Islamic schools located in urban centers such as Hat Yai, where the linguistic distance between the Siamese language and Arabic is considerably wider than that between Malay or Indonesian and Arabic. This condition differs markedly from the contexts most commonly studied to date, given that Malay and Indonesian have a long history of absorbing Arabic vocabulary in religious and scholarly domains as shown by research on phonological changes in Arabic loanwords within the Indonesian dictionary, KBBI (Shah & Mardiah, 2023), as well as semantic studies of Arabic loanwords in Arabic-Malay dictionaries, which confirm that interference resulting from long historical contact between Arabic and Malay extends beyond phonetics into lexical and syntactic levels as well. Such loanwords empirically function as a *lexical bridge* that facilitates vocabulary retention for Malay-speaking learners an advantage that is structurally absent for Siamese-speaking learners, since Thai (a member of the Kra-Dai language family) lacks the historical lexical ties with Arabic that Malay possesses.

This study is necessary because the transition of schools such as Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi from traditional pesantren toward modern Islamic institutions has introduced new complexities, such as the conflict between academic Arabic demands and semi-military training obligations, as well as the impact of extreme local climate conditions on students' concentration during lessons. This tension between preserving religious education and meeting the demands of institutional modernization is consistent with findings on the dynamics of conflict and conflict resolution affecting the Islamic religious education system in schools across Patani, Southern Thailand (Sulong & Machali, 2016), as well as studies on how Islamic educational institutions in the region continue to adapt under socio-political pressure while striving to preserve their collective identity through religious practice and cultural strategy.

The novelty offered by this study lies in its in-depth exploration of what the

author terms "Siamese-Arabic linguistic friction" that is, how the complete difference in writing direction (Thai is written left to right, Arabic right to left) and the absence of shared vocabulary between the two languages affect students' writing and listening comprehension in ways that differ from previous Indonesian- or Malay-based findings. By employing a descriptive qualitative method at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School, this study identifies a specific "multilingual gap," in which students must navigate the phonetic constraints of the Thai language while striving to meet Arabic academic standards. This paper therefore offers a localized solution framework to bridge the gap between conventional grammar-focused instruction and the practical needs of students within a minority-Muslim educational setting in Thailand.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to explore the linguistic and non-linguistic challenges in Arabic language learning. A descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because it aims to provide an in-depth account of a phenomenon through data in the form of words and description rather than numbers (Moleong, 2003), while also enabling a naturalistic understanding of the research setting as it exists in the field (Sugiyono, 2014). This approach is considered appropriate for capturing the pedagogical friction within the unique multilingual context of Southern Thailand, consistent with other studies on Arabic learning problems that likewise rely on descriptive qualitative designs to provide a detailed account of learning strategies and obstacles (Widayanti & Dewi, 2024).

Sampling Technique and Participants

This study employed purposive sampling to select five Arabic teachers as the primary informants, given their direct expertise regarding the school curriculum and the challenges faced by students. Purposive sampling was chosen because it allows sample selection based on specific considerations or criteria relevant to the research objective. In addition, stratified sampling was applied to the student population of 716 (281 males and 435 females) to ensure representation across all academic levels, from Matayum 1 through Matayum 6. Participants were native Thai citizens, the majority of whom live their daily lives within a Siamese-speaking environment.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected through three primary techniques: (1) in-depth interviews, conducted using a semi-structured protocol focusing on phonological, morphological, and syntactic barriers, with each session lasting 45–60 minutes to allow deep exploration of teaching experiences and observed student difficulties; (2) direct observation, using a structured observation checklist to monitor classroom interaction, teacher-student engagement, and the influence of environmental factors such as hot weather and classroom overcrowding, conducted across 20 different class sessions covering both middle and high school levels; and (3) documentation, involving a review of the *Al-'Arabiyyah lil-Nashi'in* textbooks,

school teaching schedules, and samples of student writing (*imla'* and *insha'*) to triangulate the findings. This combination of instruments is consistent with common practice in descriptive qualitative research on Arabic education, which typically integrates interviews, observation, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive picture.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained through the school's administration. All participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement, with an explanation that their identities would remain confidential and that the data would be used solely for academic purposes to improve Arabic instruction.

Data Analysis

Data collection continued until data saturation was reached the point at which no new linguistic or non-linguistic problems emerged from further interviews or observations. The analysis followed the thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), consisting of six stages: familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This framework was selected for its flexibility in accommodating data from multiple sources simultaneously, as was also the case in this study. The analytic process involved: (1) *coding procedures*, in which data were initially processed through open coding, labeling specific issues (e.g., "Siamese writing-direction conflict" or "absence of loanwords"); (2) *thematic identification*, in which these codes were grouped into two major themes Linguistic Problems (phonology, vocabulary, morphology, writing, and syntax) and Non-Linguistic Problems (motivation, facilities, and environment); and (3) *final synthesis*, in which the resulting patterns were interpreted narratively to propose localized solutions.

Result and Discussion

Arabic Language Lessons in Thailand

The development of the Arabic language cannot be separated from the spread of Islam (Herniti & others, 2017). Arabic, as a means of communication, played an important role in the spread of Islam because it was certainly used to convey Islamic teachings (Dema, 2008). The religion of Islam, which entered the Malay region (Malaysia, the east coast of Sumatra, around the coast of Kalimantan, southern Thailand, and the small islands stretching along the Strait of Malacca) in the ninth century (Saifullah & MA, 2010), contributed to the development of the language as it exists today. The period from the beginning of the thirteenth century to the end of the fifteenth century CE, in the context of Malay literature, is called the transitional period during which the Malay people began to recognize written traditions. Previously, they had known only oral traditions in their literature.

In the late decades of the thirteenth century CE, the influence of Sanskrit gradually declined in Malay lands. This influence went into decline as the influence of Srivijaya faded on the island of Sumatra. Gradually, the influence of the Sanskrit language grew increasingly weak until it was eventually overtaken by the influence

of the Arabic language, which began to spread in the early fourteenth century CE (Abdullah, n.d.).

Muslims in Thailand are concentrated in the southern regions such as Narathiwat, Pattani, Satun, and Yala (Ibrahim, 2012). Islam in Thailand is a minority religion after the majority Buddhist religion there. The number of Muslims is approximately 6 million people, or only 4.3% of Thailand's population (Factbook, 2019)

Islamic religious education in Thailand is similar to education in Indonesia, in that it is centered on Islamic boarding schools (pesantren/pondok). There are four languages used in Thai [Islamic education]: English, Siamese (Thai), Malay, and Arabic. The Siamese language is used for general educational subjects. The Malay language is used for communication and is also taught as a subject. Arabic is used for religious subjects (Jehwae & others, 2014). Nowadays, the form of Islamic boarding school education differs somewhat from that of earlier pondoks. Dema (2008: 23) explains that Islamic boarding schools at this time are, in fact, private Islamic schools. Although these Islamic schools are private in form, the financial resources for administrative purposes are also funded by the Thai kingdom. Financial assistance is provided if secular or academic subjects (mathematics, science, geography, etc.) are taught in the Thai language.

The distribution of subjects and the language of instruction used in Islamic boarding schools in Thailand is described as follows:

No.	Mata Pelajaran	Waktu Belajar Perminggu	Bahasa yang Digunakan
1	Al-Qur'an	80 Menit	Bahasa Melayu
2	Tafsir	80 Menit	Bahasa Arab
3	Fiqih	80 Menit	Bahasa Arab
4	Hadis	80 Menit	Bahasa Arab
5	Tarikh	80 Menit	Bahasa Melayu
6	Bahasa Arab	80 Menit	Bahasa Arab
7	Bahasa Melayu	80 Menit	Bahasa Melayu
8	Akhlak	40 Menit	Bahasa Melayu
9	Bahasa Thai	120 Menit	Bahasa Thai
10	Bahasa Inggris	80 Menit	Bahasa Thai
11	Matematika	120 Menit	Bahasa Thai
12	Matematika Tambahan	40 Menit	Bahasa Thai
12	Sains	240 Menit	Bahasa Thai
13	Sejarah	80 Menit	Bahasa Thai
14	Ilmu Sosial	80 Menit	Bahasa Thai
15	Komputer	80 Menit	Bahasa Thai
16	Seni	40 Menit	Bahasa Thai
17	Ilmu Kesehatan	40 Menit	Bahasa Thai
18	Olahraga	80 Menit	Bahasa Thai
Jumlah		1600 Menit/26 Jam Perminggu	*Bahasa Melayu (280 Menit) *Bahasa Arab (320 Menit) *Bahasa Thai (1000 Menit)

Figure 1. Subject language in Islamic boarding schools

In light of these details, the Arabic language becomes a vital necessity in teaching in Thailand, particularly for the development of Islamic religious education. In general, Islamic boarding schools function as private Islamic schools and have contributed significantly to the sustainability and development of the Arabic language in Thailand.

Overview of Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School

Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School was established in 1960 by Mr. Aris Ahmad. Initially a public school, it transformed in 1970 into an Islamic school with Mr. Aris Ahmad as the licensed owner and director, and Sob bin Yaqub as the school principal. At that time, the school only served grades 1–3 (middle school level). Then in 1995, the position of licensed owner and director was handed to Mr. Yahya Sri Ahmad, with Mr. *Sam Sa Lam* appointed as school principal. In 2005, the school expanded from one level to include the high school level, i.e., grades 4 to 6 (high school). Also in 2005, the Darus Salam Educational Foundation was established, and since then the school has operated under this foundation's auspices. A dormitory for male and female students who wish to board was also established. In 2007, the directorship was transferred to Mr. Worsanlee Sri Ahmad, with Mr. Niran Syed appointed as school principal.

Currently, Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School has 716 students from grades 1-6 of the middle and high school levels, consisting of 229 male students and 413 female students, with 100 male students in the male dormitory and approximately 200 in the female dormitory, while the rest commute from home.

Table 1. Student Population at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School

Level	Class	Male	Female	Total
Middle School (Matayum 1-3)	VII-IX	167	238	405
High School (Matayum 4-6)	X-XII	114	197	311
Total		281	435	716

There are approximately 44 teachers at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School, all of them native Thai citizens. However, each semester the school also brings in 2 to 5 additional teachers directly from Indonesia, usually university students participating in overseas KKN (community service) or PPL (teaching practice) programs from universities across Indonesia. Of these 44 teachers, only 5 are Arabic teachers, meaning each Arabic teacher teaches Arabic 2 to 3 times per day, since the middle school has 11 classes and the high school has 9 classes (Student Population as of September 22, 2019).

Arabic Language Teaching at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School

Arabic is generally taught in Thailand at Islamic schools, particularly in the southern regions of the country where Muslims mostly reside. Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School is an Islamic school that also teaches Arabic. It is located in Khuan Tao, Hat Yai, Songkhla, southern Thailand, and has two levels: middle school and secondary school. Teaching Arabic at this school is essential, since Arabic supports students in learning Islam in line with the school's vision and mission. In addition to Arabic, another foreign language is taught especially in the provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani. Nearly all residents of these provinces can speak Malay, because Malay was the official language of the former Sultanate of Pattani and is a shared heritage among the people of southern Thailand. Malay is therefore also used in religious books and works of Arabic literature, enabling students to study religion

through Malay as well. From the above, it follows that the students of Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School are required to learn multiple languages: Thai, Malay, Arabic, and English. Arabic is one of the languages taught to students at the school. The Arabic curriculum and teaching schedule for the first semester at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School (data as of 22 September 2019) are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Arabic Curriculum by Class

Class	First-Semester Topics & Objectives	Second-Semester Topics & Objectives	Textbook
Class 1	Introductions, numbers, my school, my garden, markets of knowledge	Occupation, nationality, the library, a religious visit	Al-'Arabiyyah lin-Nashi'in, Book 1
Class 2	Homework, sports matches, exams, hobbies	Arabic grammar rules	Al-'Arabiyyah lin-Nashi'in, Book 2
Class 3	Reading an article, listening, and a lecture; sentences and verbs; conversation in the library	Nouns and verbs, singular and plural; conversation about food and drink; applying conversation	Al-'Arabiyyah lin-Nashi'in, Book 3
Class 4	At the mosque, the month of Ramadan, Eid al-Adha; syntax/morphology basics, masculine/feminine, verb types; dialogues at the mosque, market, home, school	Eid day, migration (hijrah), free time, exercises; subject/object markers, adverbs of time and place, masculine/feminine forms; dialogue "Who is she," daily-life conversation	Al-'Arabiyyah lin-Nashi'in, Book 4
Class 5	Sports day, the trip, "From the Houses of Allah"; parts of speech, verb types, root/derived and sound/weak verbs, transitive/intransitive verbs; dialogue "Su'ad Tawaffur," ask-and-search	Subject and predicate, nominal sentence structure (masc./fem.); conversation about daily life and other people	Al-'Arabiyyah lin-Nashi'in, Book 5
Class 6	Reading Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir); determining grammatical case (i'rab); daily conversation and its lessons; writing about	Word types (noun, verb, particle); verb tenses (past, present, imperative); explaining creative stories,	Al-'Arabiyyah lin-Nashi'in, Book 6

	social life; sentence ordering	interpreting vocabulary/sentences, talking about oneself	
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Linguistic Problems in Arabic Learning

The term "problematics" derives from the English word "problematic," meaning a problem. According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (Debdikbud, 2002), a problem is something that must be solved in other words, the gap between reality and expectation that must be closed in order to achieve optimal results. The Indonesian word "pembelajaran" (learning) is built on the root "ajar" (teach), meaning instruction given so that people come to know something they did not know before; with certain affixes it comes to denote the method or process by which people learn. In Arabic, the equivalent terms are "ta'lim" (teaching) or "tadris" (instruction). Combining these, "learning problems" can be defined as the problems that hinder the teaching of a given subject.

Problems in Arabic-language learning can be classified into various types. Theoretically, Fahrurrozi (2014) divides them into two categories: linguistic problems and non-linguistic problems, which also affect learning but are not directly related to the language, and which can nonetheless be dominant enough to undermine the success of a learning program and its implementation. The linguistic problems in teaching Arabic to students of Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School are set out below.

Phonology (علم الأصوات)

Phonological challenges at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School stem from the structural friction between the Arabic phonetic system (29 consonants and 3 vowels) and the Siamese system (44 consonants and 32 vowels). This mismatch creates two distinct patterns of errors among students. First is the pattern of consonantal substitution, where students struggle with Arabic phonemes that do not exist in Siamese, specifically the guttural and emphatic letters such as *khot* (خ), *ro* (ر), *tho* (ظ), and *'ain* (ع). The second is a pattern of phonetic interference, illustrated by the tendency to nasalize sounds; for instance, students often mispronounce "لَغَيْبٍ" (*lil-ghaib*) as "لِنَغَيْبٍ" (*lin-ghaib*), substituting the lateral 'l' with a nasal 'n' common in local phonetic habits. These issues are further complicated by the students' inability to distinguish between the melodic requirements of Quranic recitation (*tajweed*) and the prosody of academic reading (*muthala'ah*). Ultimately, these persistent phonological patterns act as a significant barrier to the development of students' speaking skills (*maharah al-kalam*). Students also find it difficult to pronounce consonants in the middle of a word for example pronouncing "Sawadee Krap" as "Sawadee Kap," and "Kruu" as "Kuu." They likewise struggle with certain Arabic letters such as *khā'*, *rā'*, *dād/ẓā'*, and *'ayn*. Teachers must therefore train students to pronounce Arabic letters correctly to avoid repeated errors in reading practice or Qur'anic recitation, and to help them distinguish between the two. This problem in turn affects speaking skills, since students are unable to speak Arabic with correct pronunciation.

These findings align with recent research on Arabic phonological acquisition among non-native speakers. Husein et al. (2023) found that learners in Southeast Asian contexts consistently struggle with the articulation of pharyngeal and uvular consonants absent in their mother tongues, confirming the phonological interference observed at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School. Furthermore, a study on Arabic speaking skills at a Southern Thai Islamic school by Chapakiya & al. (2026) revealed that students who lacked explicit phoneme-discrimination training performed significantly worse in oral assessments, underscoring the need for targeted makhraj al-huruf instruction in Thai-speaking contexts. Ismail et al. (2023) similarly documented that unsuitable teaching methods for Arabic phonology exacerbate pronunciation errors among students at Princess Naradiwas University in Thailand, suggesting that the problem is systemic across the region rather than isolated to a single institution.

Vocabulary (المفردات)

Arabic learners in Thailand, particularly at this school, have limited vocabulary retention because few Siamese words have absorbed Arabic vocabulary. Unlike Malay or Indonesian (which share many Arabic loanwords), the Siamese language uses entirely different terms. For example, the word “صلاة” used in Malay and Indonesian is replaced in Thai by “lamad.” Teachers typically provide vocabulary before each new lesson, with some teachers dedicating a full class period to explaining Arabic vocabulary. Limited vocabulary also causes listening comprehension difficulties, as students struggle to understand fast-paced Arabic speech. Transfer problems from foreign language to Siamese also cause: (1) semantic shift, (2) change in pronunciation from original sounds, and (3) preserved pronunciation with changed meaning.

This vocabulary gap is well-documented in recent scholarship. Abdullah et al., (2024) confirmed that Thai and Cambodian students learning Arabic in Indonesia face a substantially wider lexical gap than Malay or Indonesian learners, precisely because Siamese lacks the Arabic loan-word layer present in the Malay-language family. Their study recommends thematic vocabulary clusters tied to daily Islamic practice as the most efficient bridging strategy a technique already partially employed by teachers at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School. Additionally, Zurqoni & al., (2020) noted that limited study hours and poor vocabulary exposure significantly hinder Arabic achievement in Thai Islamic schools, calling for structured pre-lesson vocabulary exposure, consistent with the school's current pre-lesson vocabulary provision practice.

Morphology (علم الصرف)

Morphology (*sarf*) is the science that deals with word formation changes and is closely related to syntax (*nahw*). Morphological problems at this school include: (1) the many chapters and topics within *sarf*; (2) the integration required between *sarf* and *nahw*, as both are strongly linked in Arabic grammar; (3) the large number of words that are *sami'i* (transmitted) and *qiyasi* (derived by analogy); and (4) proper use of pronouns during speaking activities.

Recent literature reinforces the challenge of Arabic morphology for non-native learners. A systematic review by Rahman (2026) highlighted that traditional sarf instruction is increasingly criticised for failing to develop functional morphological competence in communicative contexts. Rofiq & Najib (2022) further argued that developing morphological thinking skills, rather than rote pattern recall, leads to more durable retention among learners in non-Arabic environments. These findings suggest that integrating meaning-oriented morphology tasks into the existing curriculum at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School would complement the current grammar-focused approach and improve students' productive use of Arabic.

Writing (الكتابة)

Middle school students (*Matayum 1-3*) are at the stage of writing Arabic letters, while high school students (*Matayum 4-6*) have reached the *insha'* (composition) stage. According to Ahsanuddin & Asrori (2017), Arabic writing instruction passes through two stages: letter-writing (*imla'*) and composition (*insha'*). Writing problems generally arise from the complete difference between Arabic and Siamese writing systems. Arabic is written from right to left, while Siamese is written from left to right. Many students have not memorized the Arabic alphabet, and errors in letter memorization cause further errors in connecting and forming Arabic letters.

Writing difficulties for Arabic learners in non-Arabic script environments are widely reported. Munawarah & Zulkiflihn (2021) documented that students whose native scripts run left-to-right face a significantly steeper curve in Arabic *imla'* (dictation) and letter-joining tasks. Their study at an Indonesian Islamic school mirrors the pattern at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School, where Siamese script orthography conflicts with Arabic directionality at the most fundamental level. Oktavian et al. (2026) similarly found that step-by-step grammar instruction combined with daily letter-tracing exercises substantially reduced writing errors among Indonesian madrasah students, offering a scalable model for the Thai school context.

Syntax / Grammar (النحو)

Unlike morphology which focuses on word form changes, syntax (*nahw*) focuses on the relationships between sentence elements. Grammar problems at this school include: differences in sentence patterns and word order between Arabic and Siamese, which cause numerous errors in both spoken and written Arabic. For example, the sentence “*aism madrasati madrasatu nahdhati al-‘ulum*” follows a different pattern when translated into Siamese:

Table 3. Comparison of Sentence Patterns across Languages

Language	Word 1	Word 2	Word 3
Arabic	اسم (Name)	مدرستي (My School)	مدرسة نهضة العلوم
Indonesian	nama (name)	sekolah... ku (my school)	Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi
Thai (Siamese)	ชื่อ (name)	โรงเรียน...ฉัน (my school)	โรงเรียนส่งเสริมวิทยามูลนิธิ

**Thai Sentence
Patterns**Rongreīyn c̄han Ch̄ux Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi
Or

Ch̄ux rongreīyn k̄hxng c̄han Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi

Furthermore, Arabic grammatical case endings (*i'rab*) do not exist in other foreign languages, making it difficult for students to avoid errors in writing and speaking. Some students have memorized Arabic grammar rules, but many still cannot apply them in conversation. To address grammar problems, the teacher provides many exercises on nahw and sarf, and conducts reading practice from the Arabiyya lil-Nashi'in textbook with follow-up questions about Arabic grammatical rules.

Semantics (علم الدلالة)

Semantics (*dilalah*) is the science of meaning, closely related to morphology and syntax. In Arabic learning, problems include the different meanings of various sentence types and the fact that Arabic words often carry multiple meanings with specific characteristics. When reading texts in the Arabiyya lil-Nashi'in book, students encounter words with identical spelling but different meanings, making comprehension difficult. The teacher addresses this by presenting difficult vocabulary before each new lesson and providing sentence-by-sentence explanations. Additionally, whereas Siamese compound nouns are formed by joining words (e.g., "nam" (water) + "tok" (fall) = "namtok" meaning waterfall), Arabic uses a single word (شلال), requiring students to learn entirely new vocabulary structures. To address this, teachers pre-teach difficult vocabulary before introducing new material, build understanding sentence by sentence, and highlight key points after the lesson. One area students find especially difficult is that Arabic nouns often carry multiple meanings and specific features; similarly, in terms of meaning, as shown Table 4 below:

Table 4. Thai nouns are formed from other nouns

Indonesian	Arabic	Thai	Derived from
air terjun	al-shallāl (waterfall)	น้ำตก (namtok)	น้ำ (nam) = water + ตก (tok) = fall
sekolah	al-madrasah (school)	โรงเรียน (rongrian)	โรง (rong) = place + เรียน (rian) = study
es batu	al-muka"abah (ice cube)	น้ำแข็ง (nam khaeng)	น้ำ (nam) = water + แข็ง (khaeng) = hard

Non-Linguistic Problems in Arabic Learning

Non-linguistic problems at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School encompass various internal and external factors that hinder the effectiveness of Arabic language learning. From a psychological and student background perspective, the primary challenge arises from a lack of motivation, as some students consider Arabic

relevant only for religious studies rather than as a global communication tool. This condition is exacerbated by diverse educational backgrounds, where many students did not receive a foundation in Arabic or Quranic reading at the elementary level, making the teaching burden at the secondary level significantly heavier. Additionally, classroom disruptions such as mobile phone use, absenteeism due to illness or laziness, sleeping during lessons, and visiting the canteen during class hours serve as factors that undermine learning consistency.

Institutionally, the school faces serious constraints regarding the limited number of instructors. There are only five Arabic teachers out of a total of 44, which directly impacts scheduling complexity and teacher workload. This issue is further complicated by the incomplete implementation of the school curriculum for Arabic instruction and a policy that still integrates all branches of Arabic linguistics (such as *nahw*, *sarf*, and *balaghah*) into a single subject, even though a division of sub-disciplines is theoretically vital for in-depth material mastery.

Finally, environmental and logistical factors contribute negatively to the academic climate. The absence of an Arabic-speaking environment in the students' daily lives, which are dominated by the Siamese language, combined with the lack of language clubs or extracurricular activities like speech contests or *nasheed*, leaves students without a platform to practice their skills. External factors such as extreme heat (reaching 31°C or more) and overcrowded classrooms (more than 40 students) significantly decrease learning concentration. Furthermore, the academic schedule is frequently disrupted by mandatory military training for male students on Thursday afternoons and the cancellation of classes due to various school events, such as sports days, seminars, and field trips.

These non-linguistic challenges are consistent with findings from similar institutional contexts. A study at Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus (Arabiyatuna, 2026) found that student-related factors were the dominant barriers to Arabic oral proficiency among Thai university students, reflecting the same motivational deficit observed among secondary students at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School. Selim & Abdalla (2022), examining adolescent non-Arab Muslim learners of Arabic at Australian Islamic schools, found that students who understood Arabic's role beyond religious ritual demonstrated significantly higher intrinsic motivation. Institutionally, the issue of inadequate teacher numbers mirrors patterns documented in Indonesian Islamic schools (Oktavian et al., 2026), where insufficient Arabic teachers relative to class numbers consistently correlates with lower student engagement and achievement. The environmental factor has been specifically addressed by Suhardi & Sutarjo (2024), whose research confirmed that consistent exposure to an Arabic-language environment outside the classroom is the single most impactful non-linguistic variable for developing speaking fluency in second-language Arabic learners.

Solutions to Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Problems

According to Nasta'an (2015), activities to solve Arabic learning problems include: (1) general secondary education, (2) contextual Arabic teaching, (3) Arabic

teaching based on Quranic and Hadith stories, (4) qualified teachers, and (5) a conducive environment. To achieve these five components, teachers must dedicate all their energy and continuously improve their approach to Arabic language teaching or the science of teaching to create innovations during classroom instruction. Furthermore, cooperation between teachers and students is essential for improvement (Azizah et al., 2015).

Specific solutions for linguistic problems at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School are as follows: (1) For phonology, the teacher uses various methods to reinforce proper Quranic recitation and muthala'ah reading, and must study makhraj al-huruf (articulation points) and Arabic accent. (2) For vocabulary, the teacher enriches students' vocabulary by providing it before each new lesson, requiring students to memorize common vocabulary from texts they frequently read, such as vocabulary in prayers and Quranic recitation. (3) For morphology, the teacher provides sarf rules related to the topics being taught, so that sarf lessons follow the curriculum rather than the reverse. (4) For writing, the teacher provides imla' (dictation) and naskhi script materials in the first grade, practicing letter connection to avoid future writing errors. (5) For syntax, the teacher provides nahw rules related to the topics being taught, and helps students understand the differences between Arabic and Siamese in sentence arrangement.

Solutions for non-linguistic problems at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School include: holding seminars about Arabic in the globalization era to increase students' awareness of the benefits of learning Arabic and to boost their motivation; conducting lessons in engaging formats such as games, practice exercises, and memorization activities; holding weekly Arabic teacher meetings to consult about classroom issues, curriculum implementation, and teaching pace; teaching additional Arabic sub-disciplines beyond the official curriculum (nahw, sarf, insha', Arabic calligraphy, imla'); organizing Arabic extracurricular activities such as nasheed (Islamic songs) in Arabic with Siamese translation; conducting outdoor learning activities during hot weather; and providing enrichment materials at the end of each lesson along with make-up assignments for absent students.

Conclusion

Arabic is taught in Thailand generally in Islamic schools, especially in the southern provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, Songkhla, and Yala, where Muslims predominantly reside. Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School is an Islamic school in Hat Yai, Songkhla, Southern Thailand, that actively teaches Arabic. The school faces numerous problems in Arabic instruction, which can be divided into two main categories: linguistic problems and non-linguistic problems.

The linguistic problems at Songserm Wittaya Mulnithi School generally arise from the many differences between Arabic and the Siamese language, particularly in pronunciation (distinguishing muthala'ah reading from Quranic recitation), sentence pattern formation, the limited number of Siamese words borrowed from Arabic (unlike Indonesian or Malay), the extensive Arabic grammatical rules, the

difference between Arabic right-to-left writing and Siamese writing direction, and the large number of Arabic synonyms.

The non-linguistic problems generally arise from issues related to students' motivation, educational background, insufficient number of Arabic teachers, inadequate curriculum implementation, absence of Arabic sub-discipline differentiation, lack of an Arabic-speaking environment, absence of an Arabic language club, extreme heat, overcrowded classrooms, military training attendance obligations, mobile phone use in class, student absenteeism, and frequent cancellation of Arabic lessons due to school events.

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Author Contribution Statement

IFR conducted field research, interviews, and observation. MAKN assisted in data analysis and literature review. YA supervised the study, provided methodological guidance, and reviewed the final manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Declaration of Using AI

The authors did not use AI tools in the preparation of this manuscript.

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