Enhancing Arabic Vocabulary Mastery through Tafsir al-Shawi: A Pedagogical Approach in Islamic Education

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Abstract

This study examines the pedagogical use of Tafsir al-Shawi as an authentic linguistic resource for enhancing Arabic vocabulary mastery in Islamic educational contexts, particularly in pesantren. The study aims to explore how exegetical explanations support learners' semantic understanding, morphological awareness, and contextual vocabulary retention beyond rote memorization. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving Arabic teachers and intermediate-level students at a pesantren in Wonosobo, Indonesia. The findings indicate that Tafsir al-Shawi facilitates vocabulary development through contextual interpretation, semantic elaboration, and root-based morphological analysis. Pedagogical strategies derived from its use include lexical highlighting, semantic mapping, cross-verse comparison, and guided meaning construction, which promote deeper cognitive processing and long-term retention. Although students initially encountered challenges related to classical Arabic style and time constraints, teacher scaffolding effectively mitigated these difficulties. This study concludes that tafsir-based vocabulary instruction offers a viable pedagogical model that bridges classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary Arabic language pedagogy, contributing to both lexical competence and Qur'anic literacy.
Keywords: *Arabic vocabulary, Tafsir al-Shawi, contextual learning, Islamic education*

Introduction

The mastery of Arabic vocabulary remains one of the most persistent challenges in Islamic educational institutions, particularly in pesantren where classical texts (kutub turats) form the foundation of the curriculum (Arisandi et al., 2025; Arisandi & Habib, 2025; Solehudin, 2025). Although students are often exposed to a vast array of Arabic materials, from nahwu–sharaf manuals to tafsir literature, many still struggle to develop a solid lexical repertoire that allows them to comprehend texts independently and communicate effectively. This gap between exposure and mastery indicates a pedagogical issue: conventional vocabulary

learning often based on rote memorization, isolated word lists, and grammar-heavy instruction does not adequately support deep semantic processing or contextual understanding. As a result, students frequently rely on translation-based comprehension rather than developing a more intuitive and integrated lexical competence (Rijal Ali & Isnaini, 2024). Just as Arabic vocabulary serves as the essential key to accessing the vast treasures of Islamic knowledge (Abdullah & Bakar, 2022; Altakhaineh & Sulaiman, 2025; Baharudin & Ismail, 2014; Hanifansyah et al., 2025), engaging with *Tafsir al-Shawi* constitutes an important first step for learners to approach the deeper meanings of the Qur'an with clarity and understanding.

Recent studies on Arabic vocabulary acquisition have emphasized the importance of contextual exposure, morphological awareness, and semantic depth in fostering durable lexical competence. Research in Arabic pedagogy has shown that vocabulary learning is more effective when learners engage with words in meaningful textual environments rather than isolated lists or decontextualized drills. Studies focusing on Qur'anic vocabulary highlight the role of root-based derivation, semantic variation, and syntactic context in shaping lexical understanding, while psycholinguistic research underscores that deeper semantic processing enhances retention and recall. At the same time, advances in Arabic language education have increasingly explored digital tools, multimedia resources, and communicative strategies to address lexical deficiencies. However, these strands of research largely operate in parallel, with limited integration between classical Islamic texts and contemporary pedagogical frameworks for vocabulary instruction.

In addition to linguistic competence, vocabulary mastery in Arabic is closely linked to learners' epistemological access to Islamic knowledge itself (Masnun et al., 2025, 2024; Masnun, 2025). In pesantren contexts, limited vocabulary does not merely hinder language performance but restricts students' ability to engage critically with religious texts, participate in scholarly discourse, and internalize theological concepts embedded in Qur'anic language (Arisandi & Habib, 2025; Habib, 2025). When learners rely excessively on translation rather than lexical understanding, their interaction with the text becomes mechanical rather than reflective, reducing the transformative potential of Islamic education (Baharun et al., 2025; Baharun & Solehudin, 2023). Integrating tafsir-based vocabulary instruction, therefore, is not simply a methodological choice but a pedagogical necessity that aligns language learning with intellectual formation. By embedding vocabulary instruction within exegetical discourse, learners encounter words as carriers of meaning, ideology, and spirituality simultaneously, allowing language acquisition to function not only as a technical skill but as a medium of worldview construction and ethical reflection within the Islamic tradition (Mahmudah, 2025; Mahmudah et al., 2024). In this sense, Arabic is not merely a subject of study but a gateway to knowledge itself a language through which the intellectual, spiritual, and

civilizational heritage of Islam is accessed and understood (Hanifansyah et al., 2025).

Studies on Qur'anic vocabulary have increasingly emphasized the importance of morphology, semantic context, and lexical variation in understanding the linguistic depth of the Qur'an. Sirhan (2025) provides one of the most comprehensive root-based mappings of Qur'anic vocabulary, demonstrating how frequency and derivational patterns strengthen lexical retention. Wahidi et al. (2024) highlight the richness of Qur'anic lexicons through their philological analysis of *Kamus Mu'jam al-Qur'an*, showing how classical manuscripts preserve lexical nuances and structural annotations that illuminate meaning. From a computational perspective, Huda et al. (2021) and Hermawan & Baizal (2025) reveal how semantic embeddings, POS tagging, and AI-based interpretation uncover lexical ambiguity and contextual meaning within Qur'anic discourse affirming that vocabulary comprehension depends heavily on syntactic roles and semantic environments. Meanwhile, Bernikova & Redkin (2022) reinforce this view by demonstrating how frequent Qur'anic verbs exhibit unique morphological distributions that differ significantly from Modern Standard Arabic. Classical scholarship offers parallel insights: Al-Kharrazi (2023) explains that Ibn Qutayba resolved semantic ambiguities through a morphology-driven interpretive model, while Zareifar & Gharibi (2024) analyze antithetical vocabulary in the Qur'an to show how meaning is highly context-sensitive. Pedagogically, Akmaliyah et al. (2023) demonstrate that Qur'anic text can be used effectively in language learning through pattern imitation, although their work focuses on translation accuracy rather than vocabulary mastery.

Despite the growing body of research on Arabic vocabulary learning and Qur'anic linguistics, a clear gap remains in the pedagogical application of classical exegetical texts for systematic vocabulary instruction. Existing studies tend to examine Qur'anic vocabulary from philological, computational, or theoretical perspectives, while pedagogical research often prioritizes modern textbooks, communicative materials, or digital platforms. Consequently, little empirical attention has been given to how tafsir literature particularly Tafsir al-Shawi can function as a structured linguistic scaffold to support semantic clarity, morphological awareness, and contextualized vocabulary learning in real classroom settings. This absence indicates a missed opportunity to integrate heritage-based Islamic scholarship into contemporary Arabic language pedagogy.

Conceptually, this study positions Tafsir al-Shawi as a pedagogical solution that mediates between classical Islamic scholarship and modern theories of vocabulary acquisition. The exegetical explanations offered in the tafsir provide context-rich input, semantic elaboration, and root-based clarification that align closely with contemporary principles of contextual learning, depth of processing, and form–meaning mapping. By embedding vocabulary instruction within exegetical discourse, Tafsir al-Shawi functions not merely as a religious commentary

but as a linguistic scaffold that enables learners to negotiate meaning, recognize lexical patterns, and internalize vocabulary through reflective engagement with Qur'anic texts. This conceptual framing allows tafsir to be reimagined as an instructional resource rather than a supplementary religious reference.

The core problem driving this study can be summarized into two major issues: (1) the limited integration of classical Islamic texts, especially tafsir, into structured vocabulary teaching; and (2) the absence of pedagogical models that connect lexical learning with contextual and exegetical analysis. While previous works discuss vocabulary acquisition strategies in language classrooms or the role of Qur'anic texts in fostering literacy, few have systematically explored how Tafsir al-Shawi may function as a pedagogical guide for vocabulary mastery. This reveals a significant research gap: the lack of empirical and theoretical exploration of tafsir-based lexical instruction in pesantren and Islamic higher education.

Given this gap, the present study aims to investigate how Tafsir al-Shawi can be pedagogically utilized to enhance Arabic vocabulary mastery among students in Islamic learning environments. The research seeks to answer the following questions:

How can Tafsir al-Shawi be integrated into vocabulary instruction to support students' semantic understanding and contextual learning? What pedagogical benefits and limitations emerge from the use of Tafsir al-Shawi as a vocabulary-learning resource?

The scope of this study is limited to the examination of selected passages from Tafsir al-Shawi that illustrate lexical explanations, semantic expansions, and contextualized meanings. It does not attempt to provide a full exegetical analysis of the text but focuses specifically on its linguistic features relevant to vocabulary development. Furthermore, the research is conducted within the context of Islamic education, particularly in traditional and modern pesantren, which may limit generalizability to other contexts such as secular Arabic programs or university-based linguistics courses.

Despite these limitations, the study carries significant academic and pedagogical value. First, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on integrating classical Islamic sources into language pedagogy, highlighting the potential of tafsir literature as authentic and contextualized linguistic input. Second, it offers a practical model for educators seeking to enrich vocabulary instruction through heritage-based texts, aligning with contemporary efforts to combine traditional scholarship with modern educational approaches. Third, by examining vocabulary learning within the framework of tafsir, this research contributes to broader discussions on contextual learning, semantic depth, and the development of Qur'anic literacy.

In summary, this study fills a notable research gap by proposing a pedagogical approach that employs Tafsir al-Shawi as a resource for enhancing Arabic

vocabulary mastery. It situates itself at the intersection of linguistic pedagogy, classical Islamic scholarship, and contemporary educational needs, thereby offering a theoretical and practical contribution to both Arabic language education and Islamic studies.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how Tafsir al-Shawi is utilized to enhance Arabic vocabulary mastery in a traditional Islamic boarding school (pesantren) in Wonosobo (Creswell et al., 2007). The qualitative design was chosen to capture the natural teaching–learning dynamics surrounding classical texts and to understand how teachers and students interpret lexical explanations within the tafsir. The research was conducted in a pesantren known for its strong emphasis on kitab kuning and daily halaqah learning, making it an appropriate setting for examining tafsir-based vocabulary instruction. Participants consisted of one senior Arabic teacher, two teaching assistants, and twelve intermediate-level students selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that all had direct engagement with tafsir studies.

Data analysis was conducted through an iterative qualitative process following the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the reduction stage, observation notes, interview transcripts, and documentary materials were coded inductively to identify recurring lexical patterns, instructional strategies, and learner responses related to tafsir-based vocabulary learning. The display stage involved organizing emerging themes into analytic matrices that connected exegetical explanations with observed pedagogical practices. Finally, conclusions were drawn through constant comparison across data sources, allowing the researchers to refine categories and establish analytic coherence between instructional processes and vocabulary development outcomes.

Methodologically, this study departs from earlier research on Qur'anic vocabulary that predominantly relies on philological analysis, corpus-based computation, or experimental measurement of lexical gain. While such studies provide valuable theoretical and quantitative insights, they often overlook how vocabulary knowledge is pedagogically constructed and negotiated within authentic instructional settings. By employing a classroom-based qualitative design, the present study addresses this methodological gap by foregrounding the interpretive processes through which teachers and learners engage with exegetical explanations during vocabulary instruction. This approach enables a deeper examination of pedagogical mediation, learner interpretation, and contextual meaning-making that remain underexplored in prior research.

To ensure methodological rigor and trustworthiness, this study applied multiple validation strategies, including data triangulation across observations,

interviews, and documents, as well as member checking with participating teachers to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Prolonged engagement in the research site allowed the researchers to gain contextual familiarity with pesantren learning practices, while thick description was employed to enhance transferability. These procedures strengthen the credibility and dependability of the findings and support the analytical claims derived from the qualitative data.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis of student notebooks and annotated portions of Tafsir al-Shawi (Belina, 2023). Observations focused on teaching strategies (Balcom et al., 2021), vocabulary explanation, and student responses, while interviews explored perceptions, challenges, and the pedagogical value of tafsir for vocabulary learning. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model consisting of reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the dataset. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation across data sources, member checking with teachers, and detailed descriptions of the research context to support credibility and transferability (Campbell et al., 2020). This methodological approach provides a comprehensive yet context-sensitive understanding of how Tafsir al-Shawi contributes to Arabic vocabulary development in the pesantren environment.

Result and Discussion
Lexical Development through Contextual Interpretation in Tafsir al-Shawi

The findings indicate that *Tafsir al-Shawi* substantially enhances learners' Arabic vocabulary mastery through its contextual explanations, semantic elaborations, and morphological clarifications embedded within the exegetical text. Classroom observations revealed that the instructor deliberately selected specific passages to highlight core vocabulary items, analyze their roots and morphological patterns, and discuss meaning variations across different Qur'anic contexts. This method enabled students to perceive lexical items not as isolated units but as contextually bound expressions whose meanings shift according to situational and syntactic environments. Such a pattern aligns with Firth's principle of *meaning-in-context*, which asserts that linguistic meaning becomes intelligible only within its contextual frame. Students demonstrated improved ability to map interrelated semantic fields, identify synonyms and antonyms, and trace how a single root can generate multiple derivations with nuanced meanings.

Interview Excerpts

Senior Teacher:

"Students often memorize lists of words without understanding how the meaning changes in different verses. Tafsir al-Shawi guides them to see the semantic links, so they learn how a word functions within the Qur'anic context."

Student A (18 years old):

"Before using Tafsir al-Shawi, I recognized the word but couldn't understand why its meaning changed. The tafsir helped me connect the vocabulary with the verse and the message behind it."

Student B (19 years old, female):

"The explanations make it easier to remember the vocabulary because the meanings are connected with stories or examples. It stays longer in my memory compared to memorizing from a list."

The interview data further reinforce the idea that contextualized interpretation supports deeper processing, in line with Craik and Lockhart's levels-of-processing theory. When vocabulary is encountered within meaningful, spiritually resonant, and semantically rich contexts, learners engage more cognitively and retain vocabulary for longer periods.

These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the central role of contextual exposure and morphological awareness in Arabic vocabulary acquisition. Research by Nation, Laufer, and Webb has demonstrated that vocabulary learning is significantly enhanced when lexical items are encountered within meaningful contexts rather than memorized in isolation. Similarly, studies on Qur'anic vocabulary by Sirhan and Bernikova and Redkin highlight that root-based derivation and contextual variation are key to understanding semantic nuance in Qur'anic Arabic. The present findings extend this line of research by showing that such linguistic principles are not only theoretically relevant but also pedagogically operationalized through tafsir-based instruction. Unlike earlier studies that approach Qur'anic vocabulary from philological or corpus-based perspectives, this study demonstrates how exegetical explanations in Tafsir al-Shawi function as an instructional scaffold that actively mediates learners' semantic interpretation during classroom interaction. This suggests that tafsir serves as a bridge between linguistic theory and pedagogical practice, enabling learners to internalize vocabulary through guided contextual meaning-making rather than passive recognition.

Pedagogical Strategies Emerging from Tafsir-Based Vocabulary Learning

Analysis of classroom practices revealed a set of pedagogical strategies that naturally emerged when teachers incorporated *Tafsir al-Shawi* into vocabulary instruction. These included lexical highlighting (selectively emphasizing key words), semantic mapping (linking synonyms, antonyms, and related expressions), comparative interpretation (examining the same lexical item across multiple verses), and guided translation activities in which students attempted meaning construction before referring to the tafsir. These strategies collectively fostered reflective learning and promoted active meaning negotiation, echoing Long's Interaction Hypothesis, where learners refine understanding through interaction and feedback.

Interview Excerpts

Teaching Assistant:

"Students enjoy guessing the meaning first. When we compare their interpretation with the tafsir, they reflect on their thought process. It becomes a meaningful learning experience, not just memorization."

Student C (17 years old):

"The teacher asks us to look for other verses that use the same word. This helps me understand the deeper meaning and how the word changes depending on the verse."

These strategies align with principles of input enhancement (Sharwood Smith), where learners' attention is drawn explicitly to linguistic features. Through the integration of tafsir explanations, learners notice vocabulary forms, meanings, and patterns more consciously, facilitating long-term retention and stronger lexical intuition.

Challenges and Constraints in Implementing Tafsir-Based Vocabulary Instruction

Despite its pedagogical value, the use of *Tafsir al-Shawi* in vocabulary instruction presented several challenges. Some students reported difficulty understanding the classical Arabic style used in the tafsir, especially those with intermediate proficiency. The dense linguistic structure, extended syntactic constructions, and high concentration of abstract terminology posed comprehension barriers. Additionally, some explanations assume prior knowledge of Qur'anic sciences (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*), which not all students possessed. Teachers also indicated that tafsir-based learning requires considerably more time than conventional vocabulary drills, particularly when students are encouraged to derive meanings independently before consulting the tafsir.

Interview Excerpts

Student D (18 years old):

"Sometimes the explanations are long and use classical Arabic that I'm not familiar with. I need the teacher's help to fully understand it."

Senior Teacher:

"The tafsir is very rich, but it is time-consuming. We cannot cover too many verses in one session, especially if we want students to internalize the vocabulary properly."

These challenges are consistent with prior research indicating that classical texts may be difficult for learners without sufficient scaffolding (Mahmoud, 2020; Fazel, 2018). However, selective text choice, teacher mediation, and lexical simplification strategies were found to mitigate these issues effectively.

The results of this study resonate strongly with existing research while also extending the scholarly conversation on vocabulary pedagogy in Arabic language education. Previous literature by Nation, Laufer, and Webb underscores the importance of contextual exposure for vocabulary acquisition, and this study

confirms their claims while introducing an innovative source of contextual input: classical tafsir literature. Unlike prior studies focused on modern textbooks, digital media, or communicative materials, this research highlights how *Tafsir al-Shawi* offers authentic, theologically rooted, and semantically rich linguistic input that enhances vocabulary mastery.

Furthermore, earlier works on authentic materials (Abdalla, 2018; Al-Najran, 2013) primarily emphasize journals, newspapers, or conversational texts. The present study broadens this paradigm by demonstrating that tafsir though traditionally viewed as a religious rather than linguistic text serves as an equally potent source for authentic language exposure. The findings also align with morphological studies by Barcroft and Schmitt, who argue that learners benefit from understanding root patterns and derivational forms. *Tafsir al-Shawi* naturally supports this through its frequent breakdown of lexical roots and morphological structures, offering learners enhanced insight into the inner workings of Arabic vocabulary.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study bridges the gap between classical Islamic scholarship and contemporary vocabulary acquisition models. It affirms that contextual interpretation, semantic expansion, and reflective lexical engagement core components of tafsir mirror the mechanisms advocated by modern cognitive and linguistic theories. Practically, these results carry significant implications for pesantren and Islamic educational institutions, suggesting that heritage-based texts such as tafsir can serve as powerful tools for holistic language instruction. Integrating tafsir strengthens not only vocabulary proficiency but also Qur'anic literacy, spiritual engagement, and cultural attachment to classical Islamic scholarship.

Conclusion

This study addressed its research objectives by examining how Tafsir al-Shawi can be pedagogically integrated to enhance Arabic vocabulary mastery in Islamic educational settings. The findings demonstrate that tafsir-based instruction effectively supports learners' semantic understanding, morphological awareness, and contextual vocabulary retention through exegetical explanations embedded in Qur'anic discourse. Specifically, the use of contextual interpretation, semantic elaboration, and root-based analysis enabled learners to construct deeper lexical understanding and develop greater sensitivity to meaning variation across Qur'anic contexts.

Furthermore, the study identified key pedagogical strategies emerging from tafsir-based instruction, including semantic mapping, lexical highlighting, and guided interpretation, which align with contemporary vocabulary acquisition theories while remaining rooted in classical Islamic scholarship. By positioning Tafsir al-Shawi as an authentic linguistic and pedagogical resource, this study

demonstrates how classical exegetical texts can function as effective instructional scaffolds. Overall, the findings confirm that tafsir-based vocabulary instruction offers a viable pedagogical model that bridges classical Islamic intellectual traditions with modern Arabic language pedagogy, contributing to both lexical competence and Qur'anic literacy.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study acknowledges certain limitations, including students' varying levels of proficiency in classical Arabic and the time-intensive nature of tafsir-based instruction. Future research may explore the development of structured modules or digital tools that simplify tafsir language without diminishing its depth, or examine the effectiveness of tafsir-based vocabulary instruction across different proficiency levels and institutional contexts. Practically, the findings highlight the potential for educators to integrate tafsir selectively as a meaningful complement to modern textbooks, thereby fostering deeper engagement, stronger semantic retention, and spiritually grounded learning experiences. This research underscores the relevance of heritage-based texts in contemporary language pedagogy and opens pathways for innovative, culturally rooted methods in Arabic vocabulary instruction.

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