

The Role of Qur'an Vocabulary Understanding in Improving the Memorization Results of Students at Al-Munawwir Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract :

Qur'anic memorization requires attention to both accurate recitation and understanding, yet the role of vocabulary comprehension within daily tahfidz instruction needs contextual explanation. This study examines that role, the obstacles encountered, and the strategies implemented at Pondok Pesantren Al-Munawwir Sangatta Selatan. A qualitative case study involved the pesantren leader, tahfidz teachers, and students selected purposively. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Source and technique triangulation supported credibility. The findings indicate that vocabulary comprehension was perceived to help students connect verses, retrieve forgotten passages, and engage more meaningfully in memorization and murajaah. Implementation faced differences in initial Arabic proficiency, learning pace, limited instructional time, and limited use of varied media. Teachers responded by explaining selected vocabulary before memorization, providing individual guidance, integrating meaning into murajaah, and offering motivational support. These findings suggest that vocabulary comprehension can provide semantic cues that complement oral repetition and teacher correction. However, the case study does not establish causal effects or quantify long-term retention gains. Vocabulary instruction should therefore be integrated gradually with accurate recitation, repeated retrieval, and guidance adapted to students' prior knowledge.

Keywords : *Qur'anic Vocabulary; Qur'anic Memorization; Tahfidz; Murajaah; Pesantren.*

Abstrak :

Pembelajaran tahfidz memerlukan perhatian terhadap ketepatan bacaan dan pemahaman, tetapi peran pemahaman kosakata dalam praktik menghafal sehari-hari perlu dijelaskan secara kontekstual. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran tersebut, kendala pelaksanaannya, dan strategi yang diterapkan di Pondok Pesantren Al-Munawwir Sangatta Selatan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Informan meliputi pimpinan pesantren, guru tahfidz, dan santri yang dipilih secara purposif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis melalui kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan. Kredibilitas didukung triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemahaman kosakata dipersepsikan membantu santri menghubungkan antarayat, mengingat kembali bagian yang terlupa, serta menjalani hafalan dan murajaah secara lebih bermakna. Pelaksanaannya menghadapi perbedaan kemampuan awal bahasa Arab, kecepatan belajar, keterbatasan waktu, dan terbatasnya variasi media. Guru merespons melalui penjelasan kosakata terpilih sebelum menghafal, pembimbingan individual, pengintegrasian makna dalam murajaah, serta pemberian motivasi. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa pemahaman kosakata menyediakan petunjuk semantik yang melengkapi pengulangan lafaz dan koreksi guru. Namun, desain studi kasus tidak membuktikan pengaruh kausal maupun besarnya peningkatan retensi jangka panjang. Pembelajaran kosakata karena itu perlu dipadukan secara bertahap dengan ketepatan bacaan, latihan mengingat kembali, dan pendampingan sesuai pengetahuan awal santri.

Kata Kunci: Kosakata Al-Qur'an; Hafalan Al-Qur'an; Tahfidz; Murajaah; Pesantren.

INTRODUCTION

The success of learning tahfidz Al-Qur'an needs to be understood through the quality of the memorization process and the ability to maintain memorization, in addition to the number of verses deposited. The study of Nordin et al. (2023) shows the diversity of memorization approaches and the importance of memorization maintenance in Qur'anic education. This diversity opens up questions about how repetition of readings, understanding meaning, and teacher assistance work together in learning activities. For students whose first language is not Arabic, this question becomes relevant because the ability to recite verses is not always accompanied by the ability to understand the words that compose them.

The difference between mastery of pronunciation and mastery of meaning can be seen in the research of Umam et al. (2024) at Rumah Tahfizh Baeturrahman. The contribution of memorization to vocabulary mastery is mainly found in the aspect of pronunciation, while the understanding of meaning, word formation, and use have not developed in line. The findings show that repeated exposure to verses does not automatically produce semantic knowledge. Learning tahfidz requires activities that deliberately connect word forms with meaning so that reading and memorization skills can be accompanied by directed understanding.

Mukminin (2020) describes learning Arabic vocabulary as supporting Qur'anic memorization activities. Zulkifli et al. (2025) also examined the use of understanding meaning and keywords through the orientation of verse meaning, keyword identification, and integration of memorization and comprehension. Both studies provide pedagogical reasons for including mufradat in tahfidz. However, benefit reports in an institution need to be distinguished from evidence of causal influence that applies across institutions, because initial ability, repetition schedule, and forms of mentoring can help explain learning outcomes.

The relationship between memorization and vocabulary also needs to be read according to the direction of the relationship being studied. Mazidatulfaizah (2019) examines the relationship between memorization of the Qur'an and the ability to memorize mufradat. The findings about the contribution of memorization to vocabulary cannot be directly reversed into the conclusion that vocabulary causes an increase in memorization. Baharudin and Sahad (2020), through a study of tahfiz institutions in Alor Setar, show that the use of understanding meaning in the learning system is still limited. Both emphasized the need to examine the practice of integrating meaning directly, rather than assuming it from the existence of tahfidz programs.

Evidence that is not completely in line is also important to consider. Mothar Rijan et al. (2025) found that students' perception of the benefits of Qur'an understanding was not followed by a strong relationship with the assessed memorization performance. Thus, the belief that understanding verses helps memorization is not synonymous with an increase in measurable achievements. The difference between subjective experience and assessment results is the basis for placing vocabulary comprehension as one of the supporting elements, along with repetition, reading correction, and learning conditions.

Conceptually, Ausubel's (1960) research on advance organizers provides a foundation to explain the benefits of associating new verbal material with previously available knowledge structures. In tahfidz, a recognized vocabulary can serve as a hook for the verse being studied. The depth of processing framework from Craik and Lockhart (1972) complements this explanation by placing the processing of meaning as an important dimension of memory formation. Both foundations are used to interpret the

learning process, not as direct evidence that every student who understands the meaning of words must have a stronger memorization.

Comprehension also does not eliminate the need to recall material. Agarwal et al. (2021) show the benefits of retrieval practice in school and classroom research, while Kim and Webb (2022) show the importance of setting practice breaks in second language learning. Carpenter et al.'s (2022) synthesis links recall and distance repetition practice to learning resilience. This literature helps explain why vocabulary comprehension needs to be combined with *murajaah*; however, its application to Qur'an memorization must still consider the demands of the accuracy of pronunciation and the context of the *pesantren*.

This research focuses on the Al-Munawwir Sangatta Selatan Islamic Boarding School, East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan. The problems studied are how vocabulary understanding is used in *tahfidz* activities, how teachers and students interpret its benefits, and the conditions that support or limit its implementation. The contribution of the research lies in the contextual explanation of the relationship between meaning clues, memorization repetition, and teacher assistance. The novelty is placed on the analysis of practice at the research site, not on the claim that the relationship between meaning and memorization has never been discussed before.

This study aims to analyze the role of understanding the vocabulary of the Qur'an in the process of improving the quality of student memorization, explain the obstacles to its application, and examine the strategies carried out by *pesantren*. The quality of memorization is understood through fluency, the connection of the sequence of verses, and the ease of recall reported in the learning process. The analysis is directed to produce pedagogical implications that are in accordance with the character of the case study, without turning the informant's experience into a measure of statistical effectiveness.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design at the Al-Munawwir Sangatta Selatan Islamic Boarding School, East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan. The case studied is the integration of understanding of Qur'an vocabulary into *tahfidz* and *murajaah* activities. This design allows attention to the experiences of the perpetrators, teaching practices, and institutional conditions in the natural learning environment. The focus of the analysis is on the process and meaning of experience, so the study is not designed to estimate the magnitude of the influence of vocabulary on memorization results.

The informants consist of Islamic boarding school leaders, *ustaz* or *ustazah tahfidz*, as well as students participating in the *tahfidz* program. The selection is carried out purposively based on their direct involvement and knowledge of memorization and vocabulary learning. Methodologically, the adequacy of informants needs to be assessed through the relevance and depth of information, not solely the number of participants, as explained by Malterud et al. (2016). Hennink and Kaiser (2022) also emphasized the need to consider the character of the research when discussing the adequacy of data. The two references are the basis for assessing the adequacy of information and are not used to claim undocumented saturation.

Data was obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were directed at *tahfidz* activities, the implementation of *murajaah*, and the explanation of vocabulary in learning. The interview explored the views of the leader, the teacher's experience in accompanying memorization, and the experience of the students when connecting the pronunciation with the meaning. The documentation included the learning schedule, memorization progress notes, and supporting documents for the activity. The three sources were used to read the relationship between the learning plan, the practice that took place, and the experiences conveyed by the informant.

The analysis follows the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), which includes data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. Condensation is directed at information about the role of vocabulary comprehension, learning constraints, and mentoring efforts. The presentation is done narratively so that the relationship between practice and informant explanations can be read in context. Conclusions are drawn through examining the relationship between information. In the reading of results, experience reports are distinguished from theoretical interpretations so that the concept of memory is not treated as a cognitive measurement finding.

The validity of the data is sought through triangulation of sources and techniques, accompanied by the diligence of observation and involvement of researchers in the field as well as the research approach used. Source triangulation brings together information from leaders, teachers, and students, while triangulation techniques compare interviews with observations and documentation. Nowell et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of traceability of analytical decisions for the credibility of qualitative research. Therefore, compatibility between sources needs to be read as a reinforcement of contextual interpretation, not as an automatic guarantee that all dimensions of validity have been met.

Qualitative research reporting needs to allow readers to assess the context of data collection and the relationship between evidence and conclusions. Tong et al. (2007) through COREQ and O'Brien et al. (2014) through SRQR provide a reference for the transparency of such reporting. In this study, results are interpreted as a snapshot of a single case; statistical generalization and causal effectiveness determination are not performed. Interpretations of retention are also limited to reported experiences and practices, rather than the results of longitudinal tests of memory.

FINDINGS

The results of observations and interviews reported in the study showed that vocabulary comprehension was used to help students recognize the relationship between the pronunciation and the content of the verse. The teacher gave explanations of certain words before or during memorization activities. According to the experiences conveyed by teachers and students, the recognition of meaning helps the process of connecting parts of the verse and tracing back the forgotten parts of the memorization. Thus, the role that appears to be the availability of additional clues when students remember the reading, not the replacement of repetition activities with translation.

The teacher described that students who know the meaning of words are more helpful in following the relationship between people. When faced with forgetfulness, understanding of the content of the verse can direct attention to the continuation of the reading. The explanation shows that there is a relationship between the experience of understanding and the experience of remembering. However, the difference in fluency between students cannot be stated as a single result of vocabulary mastery because the intensity of practice, experience of learning Arabic, and teacher assistance are also different.

Students are also reported to be more interested in memorizing when they know the message of the verses they are learning. Comprehension gives a personal reason to pay attention and repeat the reading, so that tahfidz activities are felt to be more meaningful. These findings are related to the motivation conveyed in the interview. The study did not provide sufficient measure of motivational change or evidence of daily behavior to conclude the formation of Qur'anic character as a measurable outcome.

The implementation of vocabulary learning faces differences in initial Arabic language skills. Some students already have mufradat provisions, while others only know the meaning of words through pesantren activities. These differences go hand in hand

with differences in the speed of understanding and memorization. This condition shows that the provision of the same material does not necessarily result in the same learning needs. The term difference in initial ability is more appropriate than determining differences in fixed cognitive capacity, because the study did not conduct intelligence tests or memory function checks.

Time constraints arise because tahfidz activities must accommodate the addition of memorization, deposit, and murajaah. Explanation of meaning is therefore often centered on words that are considered important or difficult. On the other hand, vocabulary learning still relies heavily on direct explanations from teachers, while the use of mufradat cards, visual media, and digital applications has not yet become a prominent practice. These limitations describe the conditions for learning implementation; the benefits of using certain media were not tested in this study.

The reported strategies include the insertion of vocabulary explanations before students memorize and individual guidance for students who experience difficulties. Through this assistance, teachers can adjust explanations to words or parts of verses that have not yet been understood. Murajaah reinforcement is carried out by linking the repetition of reading and questions about the meaning of certain vocabulary. This practice combines memorization checks with comprehension checks, even though the explanation of meaning has not been given in depth in all verses.

Motivation takes place through the affirmation that memorizing the Qur'an needs to be accompanied by an effort to understand its contents. The teacher directs the students' attention to the meaning of memorization activities as part of learning and appreciating religion. Overall, the results of the study show the connection between vocabulary comprehension, repetition, individual assistance, and motivation. This connection is the basis for a discussion about pedagogical mechanisms that may explain the benefits felt by students.

DISCUSSION

The role of vocabulary comprehension in this case can be interpreted as a provider of semantic clues for the recall process. In the memorization stage, students are confronted with a sequence of sounds that must be precisely preserved; the meaning of words provides an additional pathway to recognize relationships in that sequence. This interpretation is in accordance with Ausubel's (1960) framework regarding the association of new material with available knowledge and the processing depth framework of Craik and Lockhart (1972). However, this study does not directly observe the process of storing information, so the mechanism is a theoretical explanation of learning experience, not the result of neurocognitive testing.

The study of Muslim et al. (2024) on the tendency of the memory system in tahfiz students provides a relevant comparison because it places semantic tendencies along with episodic and visual dimensions. The compatibility with Al-Munawwir's case lies in the importance of meaning as one of the sources of memory aid. The difference lies in the design of the research and the instruments, so the tendency of the survey cannot be used to determine the memory profile of Al-Munawwir students. A more precise analysis is that teachers provide several forms of learning aids that can complement each other.

The separation between word form and meaning also explains why the ability to pronounce a verse is not enough to conclude vocabulary mastery. The findings of Umam et al. (2024) warn that the pronunciation aspect can develop without comparable progress in meaning. In the case of Al-Munawwir, the explanation of vocabulary by the teacher has the potential to bridge this distance. However, the understanding of the meaning of words still needs to be placed in the context of the sentence; the knowledge of the translation of words separately is not the same as the understanding of sentence structure

or the interpretation of the content of the sentence as a whole.

Husnayain and Harjo (2025) show the relevance of understanding Arabic rules for the memorization process. Compared to the attention to mufradat, the study reminds that the relationship between words also shapes understanding. Consequently, the explanation of vocabulary in tahfidz should not stop at word pairs and meanings, but be accompanied by a brief explanation of their use in verses according to the students' ability. This implication is a pedagogical development of literature comparison; Al-Munawwir's research has not tested the nahwu curriculum or translation learning specifically.

The benefits felt by students cannot be equated with the magnitude of changes in achievement. Mothar Rijan et al. (2025) showed a weak relationship between comprehension and memorization performance, even though participants' perceptions of the benefits were high. This comparison limits the conclusions of the study: the explanation of teachers and students about the ease of memorization can be accepted as a meaningful experience, but it has not yet shown that vocabulary comprehension is a dominant factor. The different findings reinforce the need to consider exercises, memorization assessments, and learning conditions in a single unit of analysis.

The integration of meaning and memorization reported in Al-Munawwir is close to the practice discussed by Mukminin (2020) and Zulkifli et al. (2025). However, the findings of the two studies do not make the same strategy automatically effective in all Islamic boarding schools. In this case, time constraints cause teachers to choose certain vocabulary and not discuss the entire content of the verses. This means that the contribution of vocabulary learning depends on the accuracy of the selection of material, the consistency of its use during murajaah, and the teacher's ability to provide assistance that students can understand.

Murajaah can be understood more sharply through the distinction between rereading and practicing recall. When students try to continue the verse without looking at the mushaf, the activity is in accordance with the principle of retrieval practice. The review of Agarwal et al. (2021) supports the benefits of this principle in the context of the classroom, while Weinstein et al. (2018) explain it along with elaboration and distance exercises as learning strategies. In tahfidz, meaning can help the process of retrieval, while the teacher ensures that the recitation that is successfully remembered remains in accordance with the correct reading.

Useful repetition is also determined by the distribution of learning opportunities. Kim and Webb (2022) show that practice distance is related to second language learning outcomes, especially when assessments are conducted after a break. Carpenter et al. (2022) affirm the reason for combining distance practice with retrieval practice. Since Al-Munawwir's research has not tested different murajaah schedules, the implication is the need to review the exercise distribution, rather than setting a specific interval as the schedule that has been proven to be the most effective for students.

The research of Nakata et al. (2023) provides additional consideration regarding the benefits and costs of time in learning distanced vocabulary. Kim and Webb (2023) also show that the influence of practice settings needs to be read along with the type of activity and the time of assessment. This comparison helps interpret the time constraints in pesantren as a matter of activity design, not simply a lack of learning hours. A brief explanation of mufradat can have a clear function if the same word is used again when remembering a verse and checked through feedback.

Karatas et al. (2025) examined the combination of several memory reinforcement techniques in vocabulary learning. The results support a focus on combined exercises, pauses, and feedback rather than relying on a single technique. The synthesis of Donoghue and Hattie (2021) also shows the importance of choosing techniques according

to the learning process and including corrections. For Al-Munawwir, this means that the benefits of vocabulary comprehension logically work alongside repetition and mentoring. Therefore, the claim that sound-based memorization is always weak or that meaning can replace repetition has no adequate basis.

The difference in students' initial abilities needs to be interpreted as a variation in support needs. Students who do not know a word must learn its form and meaning before connecting it with a verse, while more experienced students can directly use this knowledge. Baharudin and Sahad (2020) show that the existence of tahfiz institutions does not guarantee the strong use of understanding of meaning. Thus, the task of mentoring is not just to repeat the same explanation, but to help students build a relationship between pronunciation and meaning gradually while maintaining the quality of their reading.

The individual guidance reported in Al-Munawwir is relevant to respond to these needs, but its success cannot be assumed from the existence of mentoring activities alone. Assistance needs to lead to difficulties that the teacher recognizes, for example words that have not been understood or the continuation of verses that are often confused. Ummah and Ria Kusri (2022) give examples of strengthening mufradat through the writing and use of words in sentences. The difference is that tahfidz requires the constant accuracy of the text, so that vocabulary exercises function as an activity to support understanding and do not change the redaction of the verses that must be memorized.

The explanation of the meaning of words in a concise manner is similar to glossing in second language learning. Yanagisawa et al. (2020) show the benefits of providing glos for vocabulary learning from reading, with results influenced by the form of support and character of the participants. Its relevance for Al-Munawwir lies in providing access to meaning when students need help. However, research on glos in second language reading does not directly prove an increase in Qur'an memorization. Its application needs to be complemented by reading correction and comprehension checks in the context of verses.

The limitations of media variety also need to be analyzed through their learning functions. Ramezanali et al. (2021) show that the addition of glos mode does not always produce the same additional benefits. Yu and Trainin (2022) found the benefits of technology-assisted vocabulary learning as well as variations in outcomes according to learning conditions. Thus, the need for pesantren is not to add as much media as possible, but to choose media that helps students connect the form, meaning, and use of vocabulary. Simple cards can also be considered if necessary, although their effectiveness at the research site still needs to be tested.

The study of Haryono et al. (2023) shows the diversity of technology and methods to support the memorization of the Qur'an. Akbari et al. (2024) further distinguish several application models and show that their effectiveness support is not uniform. These two studies provide reasons to avoid the assumption that digitalization is an automatic solution to the limitations of the media. For Islamic boarding schools, the selection of applications should follow learning needs, the availability of mentoring, and the ability of the media to provide appropriate corrections. The application is a development option, not a strategy that can be stated to have been implemented and proven to be successful in this case.

The motivational aspect helps explain why comprehension can be related to learning engagement. Howard et al. (2021) distinguish intrinsic motivation and personal value from motivation that primarily depends on rewards or punishments, and show the relationship between the two with learning outcomes and perseverance. In Al-Munawwir, knowledge of the message of the verse can be interpreted as giving a personal reason for students to repeat memorization. However, this interpretation has not proven that motivation increases in all students or that motivational changes become a statistical

intermediary between comprehension and memorization.

Motivation by teachers therefore needs to be seen alongside success experiences and forms of mentoring. Students may feel that memorization activities are more meaningful when explanations can be followed and it is difficult to get help. However, research has not separated the influence of vocabulary explanations from pedagogical relationships with teachers. Based on the emphasis of Nordin et al. (2023) on the diversity of memorization approaches, the integration of meaning is more appropriately positioned as part of the tahfidz learning ecosystem that requires continuous maintenance, rather than as a single intervention that works without the support of other practices.

The main contribution of this study is the explanation that the role of vocabulary is contextual: meaning provides clues, murajaah provides an opportunity to recall and mentoring helps to correct difficulties. All three form a pedagogical interpretation of the reported practices. This study did not test causal relationship models, did not compare treatment and control groups, and did not provide a measurement of retention after standardized intervals. Therefore, the term improved memorization outcomes refers to perceived developments in the learning process, not the difference in scores that have been calculated.

These limitations open the direction of further research in the form of documentation of memorization changes from time to time with consistent indicators, accompanied by data on initial Arabic language proficiency and murajaah intensity. Advanced qualitative research can also deepen the experience of students who feel helped and who continue to experience difficulties. This recommendation is different from the findings that have been obtained: longitudinal recording, media testing, and determination of optimal training schedules are the next evaluation agenda. The practical implications that can be drawn from today are the gradual and proportional integration of vocabulary in tahfidz activities that remain centered on the accuracy of reading and memorization maintenance.

CONCLUSION

The understanding of Qur'an vocabulary in the case of the Al-Munawwir Sangatta Selatan Islamic Boarding School plays a role as a support for memorization and murajaah activities. The explanation of meaning helps students, according to reported experiences, connect verses and retrace forgotten memorization. This role works together with repetition, teacher correction, and mentoring, so that vocabulary understanding cannot be placed as the sole cause of the quality of memorization.

Implementation constraints include differences in Arabic language provision and learning speed, limited time, and limited media variation. The strategies reported are explanation of the selected vocabulary before memorization, individual guidance, attribution of meaning in murajaah, and motivation. The analysis shows the need for support that is tailored to the needs of students and the selection of proportional materials so that understanding is not separated from the practice of maintaining reading accuracy.

These findings support the integration of vocabulary in meaningful tahfidz learning, with the caveat that the study does not prove causal effectiveness or magnitude of long-term retention improvements. Subsequent evaluations need to record the development of memorization on an ongoing basis and distinguish the perceived benefits from changes in assessed outcomes. With these limitations, the research provides a contextual basis for learning development that combines comprehension, recall exercises, and teacher mentoring.

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