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Cognitive Approaches to Pedagogical Dilemmas in Teaching Sharaf

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the application of Cognitive Approaches in teaching Sharaf (Arabic Morphology) and to identify pedagogical challenges faced by instructors and students. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive design involving 2 Sharaf instructors and 15 first-semester students. Despite its importance, Sharaf is still taught using traditional, rule-based methods that emphasize memorization over meaningful understanding. Using a qualitative case study approach, data from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis highlight three key issues: (1) students struggle cognitively due to a lack of contextualized learning; (2) while some lecturers use contextual strategies like authentic texts and integrated skills, such innovations are not yet systemic; and (3) a mismatch exists between lecturers' and students' perceptions of effective teaching. The findings call for a reevaluation of Sharaf instruction by aligning methods with students' cognitive needs and practical language use. The study recommends a contextual, learner-centered approach to support the functional application of morphology in both comprehension and production. This approach aims to enhance learners' morphological awareness and support cognitive engagement in Arabic language learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of Arabic grammar plays a fundamental role in Arabic language acquisition (Zainal et al., 2025). Among its branches, Sharaf (Arabic morphology) enables students to comprehend the internal structure of Arabic words, which is essential for accurate text interpretation and effective communication (Hendrawan et al., 2025). However, in practice, the instruction of Sharaf often encounters various pedagogical dilemmas related to teaching methods, cognitive approaches, and students' cognitive readiness to grasp complex morphological structures (Mu'awwanah et al., 2022). In many Arabic language education programs, including at IAIN Kerinci, Sharaf instruction remains rooted in traditional, rule-based methods that emphasize memorization rather than conceptual understanding and practical application (Hajar & Qohar, 2024). While such approaches may benefit certain learners, they frequently impose a cognitive burden and hinder students from connecting theoretical knowledge with real language use. This problem aligns with the perspectives of cognitive learning theorists such as Sweller (1988) with his Cognitive Load Theory, Ellis (2003) on form-meaning mapping in second language acquisition, and VanPatten (2015) on Input Processing Theory, all of which stress that learning effectiveness depends on how information is mentally processed and integrated.

In addition, Sharaf instruction at IAIN Kerinci faces challenges such as the limited implementation of contextual and integrative teaching methods (Nofesalya et al., 2025). Although several instructors have attempted to use authentic texts or integrate morphology with other language skills, these initiatives remain sporadic and lack systematic alignment within a broader pedagogical framework. Consequently, there is a pressing need to re-evaluate existing Sharaf teaching approaches by considering students' cognitive needs, material complexity, and the relevance of morphology to real-life Arabic usage.

Studies in psycholinguistics and cognitive linguistics suggest that effective language learning should take into account working memory capacity, the processing of linguistic input, as well as the activation of mental schemas and prior learning experiences (Praptiwi & Fitra, 2025). In this context, the teaching of morphology should not focus solely on the transfer of grammatical knowledge, but also on how such knowledge is mentally constructed and meaningfully applied by students (Raswan et al., 2022). The gap between formalistic teaching methods and the cognitive processes by which students understand language constitutes one of the central dilemmas in Sharaf instruction at the higher education level.

Preliminary observations further reveal a perceptual gap between instructors and students regarding the effectiveness of instructional methods. Despite attempts to incorporate innovative techniques such as visual media or communicative activities, these practices have not been systematically embedded in the Sharaf curriculum, limiting opportunities for meaningful and reflective learning experiences. Building on the above background, this study aims to explore the pedagogical dilemmas and cognitive challenges in teaching Sharaf among first-semester students at IAIN Kerinci. It focuses on how current instructional approaches interact with students' modes of thinking and learning, and how the integration of cognitive and contextual approaches may offer a more effective and humanistic

framework for Sharaf instruction. The study ultimately seeks to identify the core issues in Sharaf teaching and propose empirically grounded recommendations for developing a more communicative, conceptually rich, and context-based instructional model for Arabic morphology.

2. METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore the pedagogical challenges and cognitive dilemmas encountered in teaching Sharaf (Arabic morphology) to first-semester students of the Arabic Language Education Program at IAIN Kerinci. The case study design was selected because it allows for an in-depth understanding of instructional phenomena within their natural context and enables the examination of interactions among instructors, students, and instructional strategies used in Sharaf teaching (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design aligns with the aim of capturing rich, contextualized insights into how pedagogical practices relate to students' cognitive engagement in morphology learning.

Participants

The study was conducted at IAIN Kerinci, where Sharaf instruction presents multiple pedagogical and cognitive challenges that are pertinent to explore. The participants consisted of 17 individuals, comprising 2 instructors who teach Sharaf courses and 15 first-semester students currently enrolled in the course. Participants were purposively selected to obtain diverse perspectives on teaching experiences, learning difficulties, and cognitive strategies related to Sharaf instruction. The purposive selection was intended to ensure information-rich cases (Patton, 2015) that could illuminate the complexity of the teaching-learning process in this context.

Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and verified with the participants for accuracy. Field notes and observation checklists were also maintained to ensure detailed and contextualized data recording (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the interactive model of (Miles et al., 2014), which involves three concurrent processes: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Through iterative reading, coding, and categorizing, major themes related to pedagogical dilemmas and cognitive challenges were identified. The analysis emphasized understanding patterns that reveal the relationship between instructional practices and students' cognitive responses. To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, the researcher applied data triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was conducted across interview, observation, and document data to cross-validate findings. Member checking was carried out by allowing participants to review and confirm interview transcripts and thematic

summaries, ensuring accuracy of interpretation. Ethical procedures were carefully followed: participants provided informed consent, their identities were anonymized, and all collected data were treated confidentially in accordance with research ethics guidelines (Creswell, 2018).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The findings of this study indicate that Sharaf learning at the Arabic Education Study Program of IAIN Kerinci is influenced by interconnected cognitive, pedagogical, and instructional factors. Students encounter difficulties in understanding and applying Arabic morphological patterns, particularly in transferring theoretical knowledge into authentic language use. The findings also reveal the predominance of traditional instructional practices, differences in perceptions between lecturers and students regarding learning challenges, and the need for a more contextual and learner-centered approach to Sharaf instruction. These findings are summarized in Table 1 and Table 2 and illustrated in Figures 1–4, which collectively provide the empirical basis for the following discussion.

3.2 Discussion

Cognitive Constraints in Learning Sharaf

Field observations and interview data revealed that most students encountered significant cognitive difficulties in learning Sharaf (Arabic morphology). They struggled to comprehend morphological patterns that were taught systematically but remained abstract (Khalilah et al., 2024), echoing findings by Yunisa (2022), who identified similar barriers in morphological comprehension. Students described Sharaf learning as “memorizing formulas without meaning,” reflecting heavy reliance on rote memorization over conceptual understanding. One student explained, “We memorize the forms, but we don’t know when to use them in conversation.” Another lecturer noted that “students can recall tashrīf tables but fail to identify them in authentic texts.” These perspectives underline the gap between memorization and comprehension observed in the data.

The analysis shows that cognitive constraints are multidimensional, encompassing: difficulty in processing linguistic and morphological information simultaneously, inability to transfer theoretical rules into authentic language use (Vovi Febriani, 2015; Ihsan et al., 2023), and limited contextual and visual support during instruction (Fitri et al., 2022).

Lecturers noted that many students could accurately recall tashrīf tables but failed to identify similar forms in Qur’anic verses or conversational Arabic. This aligns with (Hanifansyah, 2025) and Darwin et al., (2021), who highlight a persistent gap between theoretical mastery and practical application in Arabic morphology learning. Table 1 summarizes these findings, showing that complexity of morphological structures, dependence on memorization, and fragmented presentation of material contribute to an overall cognitive burden. Figure 1 further visualizes how cognitive load, rote learning, and

lack of contextual or visual scaffolding interconnect to form a systemic barrier to Sharaf mastery.

Table 1: Students' Challenges in Understanding Arabic Morphological Patterns (*Tashrīf*)

Aspect of Challenge	Description of Field Findings	Psycholinguistic Implications
1. Complexity of Morphological Patterns	Students struggle to understand the transformation of root words into various forms (verbs, nouns, adjectives) that are varied and technical.	Cognitive load increases due to the abstract pattern structures exceeding the working memory capacity of beginner students.
2. Dependence on Memorization	Learning strategies are dominated by memorizing wazn and tashrīf forms without understanding contextual meanings.	Memorization without conceptual processing hinders the construction of linguistic schemas in long-term memory.
3. Low Transfer to Real Contexts	Students can memorize patterns for exams but fail to recognize them in authentic texts or conversations.	Morphological decoding is not automatic; low automaticity disrupts real-time language input processing.
4. Fragmentation of Material	Material is presented separately and non-thematically, causing difficulties in forming a systematic overview of language patterns.	It is difficult to form integrated mental mapping or cognitive representation of the Arabic morphological system.

As summarized in Table 1, these interrelated constraints reflect the multidimensional nature of students' cognitive challenges in learning Sharaf. To illustrate these connections visually, Figure 1 presents the interaction among major psycholinguistic and pedagogical factors. As shown in Figure 1, cognitive overload, dependence on rote-based strategies, and limited contextual input reinforce one another, forming a cycle that constrains students' comprehension and retention of Sharaf structures.

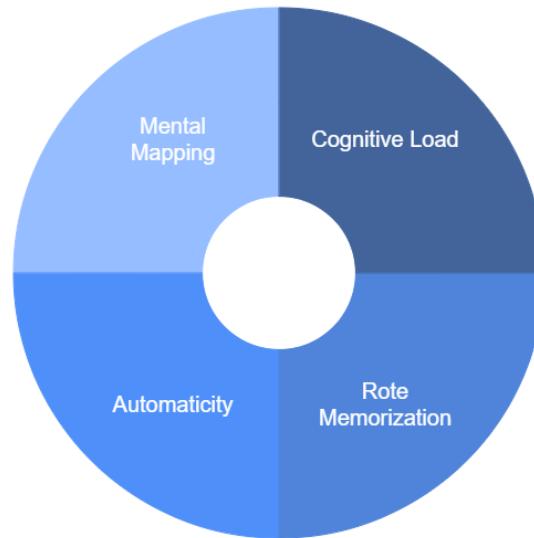


Figure 1. Challenges in Arabic Morphology Learning

As shown in Figure 1, the main cognitive constraints in Sharaf learning stem from three interrelated factors: cognitive overload, rote-based instruction, and insufficient contextual or visual scaffolding. These elements interact dynamically; excessive cognitive load limits comprehension, rote memorization prevents schema formation, and the lack of contextualization weakens knowledge retention. Together, they create a cyclical pattern that hampers students' ability to internalize and apply morphological knowledge in real communication.

The following discussion interprets these findings in relation to key cognitive and psycholinguistic theories that explain how learners process and internalize Arabic morphological structures. These findings confirm that cognitive barriers in Sharaf learning stem from both the nature of Arabic morphology and the pedagogical methods employed. The reliance on abstract, rule-based memorization documented by Fathoni (2013) creates high cognitive demands. According to Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1994), complex linguistic information that lacks contextual cues exceeds working memory capacity (Baddeley, 2012), preventing effective encoding into long-term memory.

Students' dependence on rote memorization reflects what Biggs (1999) terms "surface learning," which produces fragmented understanding and low transferability. Within Schema Theory (Wexler, 1978), effective learning requires integration of new knowledge into existing schemata; however, Sharaf teaching often isolates rules from usage, leading to weak conceptual linkage. This finding also supports VanPatten & Williams (2015), who emphasize that morphological learning becomes effective only when learners connect linguistic forms with their communicative meanings (Yul & Andrian, 2024).

This disconnection is further evident in students' inability to process forms fluently—an issue explained by Automaticity Theory (Schneider & Shiffrin, 1977; Ellis, 2002). Low automaticity results in slow, conscious decoding of morphological structures and frequent reference to notes during text analysis. This phenomenon, known as processing disfluency (Segalowitz, 2003), prevents smooth comprehension and cognitive flow.

Additionally, the absence of visual and contextual aids obstructs mental mapping, limiting schema integration. Thorne (2006) and Karpov & Haywood (1998) emphasize that visual organization and constructivist tasks help learners connect form and meaning through experiential engagement. Likewise, Aris Shusantie & Satata (2021) propose concept-based instruction using color-coded diagrams and semantic mapping to reduce cognitive burden and strengthen retention.

The results underscore the need for pedagogical reform that integrates cognitive-sensitive, context-based, and constructivist approaches in teaching Sharaf. Learning should shift from rule memorization to conceptual understanding through pattern visualization, tashrīf mapping, and contextual application.

Such methods can reduce cognitive load, enhance schema formation, and support automaticity development, enabling students to internalize morphological patterns meaningfully. This approach aligns with modern trends in Arabic language pedagogy that emphasize active, contextual, and learner-centered engagement, promoting deeper comprehension and long-term retention of grammatical knowledge (Nurhidayah et al., 2025).

Pedagogical Approaches: Between Tradition and Innovation

Pedagogical approaches form the foundation of instructional design, implementation, and evaluation, encompassing the strategies and philosophies used by educators to achieve learning goals (Sobur, 2015). In language teaching, including Arabic, the tension between traditional and innovative methods remains a central issue amid evolving learner needs (Amrullah, 2024).

Traditional pedagogy emphasizes memorization, rule-based instruction, and teacher-centered learning (Hermanto & Arifin, 2023; Junatama et al., 2025). In Sharaf teaching, this is reflected in the use of tashrīf tables, repetitive drills, and rote memorization of morphological patterns with limited contextual application (Muzakki, 2021). Although effective for establishing structural foundations, this model restricts creativity and meaningful use of language.

In contrast, innovative approaches emphasize communicative, contextual, and learner-centered instruction (Satriaman et al., 2018). Influenced by constructivism and communicative language teaching theories, they position teachers as facilitators who guide students to construct understanding through authentic learning experiences (Azhar, 2022). In Sharaf, this may include integrating morphology with authentic texts, utilizing technology, and applying grammatical rules in communicative tasks to enhance contextual understanding (Arsya & Safitri, 2019). Figure 2 illustrates the internal

cognitive processes that hinder effective morphology learning, particularly how limited working memory and insufficient schema integration affect comprehension and knowledge transfer in Sharaf instruction

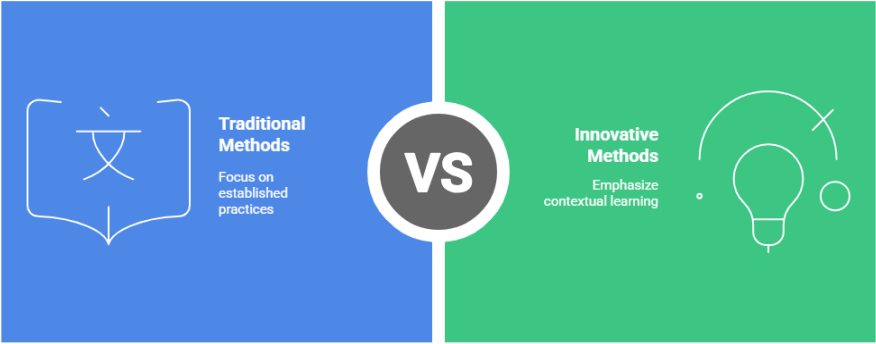


Figure 2. Choose the best instructional approach for IAIN Kerinci

As depicted in Figure 2, students often struggle to process morphological input because their working memory is overloaded by abstract forms presented without context. The figure highlights that ineffective schema construction and the absence of conceptual reinforcement prevent information from moving into long-term memory. This process results in fragmented understanding and poor application of morphological rules in authentic language use. While Figure 2 focuses on mental processing, Figure 3 presents the pedagogical dimensions that contribute to these cognitive barriers, emphasizing how teaching methods and classroom practices shape students’ cognitive engagement.

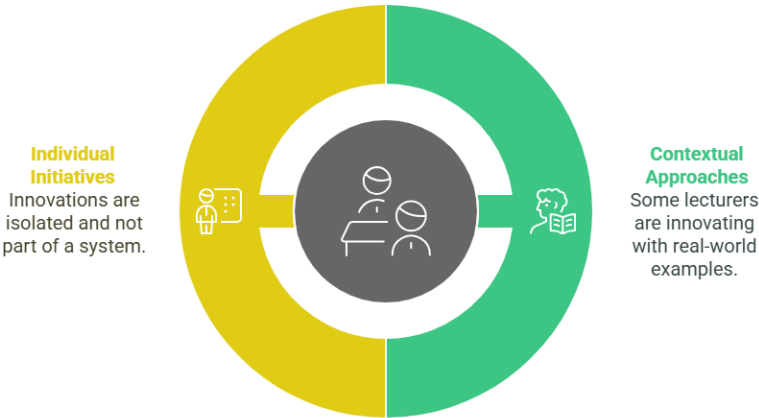


Figure 3. Teaching Innovation at IAIN Kerinci

As shown in Figure 3, pedagogical practices that rely heavily on rule-based explanation and memorization increase cognitive burden and reduce meaningful learning. The figure demonstrates that the absence of contextualized exercises, visual tools, and student-centered activities limits opportunities for active processing and reflection. Consequently, learning becomes teacher-driven and cognitively passive,

hindering the internalization of morphological concepts.

The Perception Gap between Lecturers and Students

The perception gap between lecturers and students refers to differences in how both groups interpret and evaluate the learning process (Ariyanto et al., 2023).. Lecturers often focus on curriculum goals and assume their methods are adequate, while students feel that the teaching approaches are monotonous, fast-paced, or mismatched with their learning needs (Usman, 2016; Andrian & Yul, 2023; Dolong 2016). In the context of Sharaf instruction at IAIN Kerinci, this gap is evident: lecturers attribute students' difficulties to lack of discipline, whereas students view the methods as overly theoretical and disconnected from real communication (Husna, 2024). Such misalignment demonstrates the need for more responsive and engaging pedagogical practices.

The absence of constructive dialogue and feedback reinforces a one-way transmission model that limits student participation (Emilia et al., 2025). This contradicts Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist principle, which emphasizes learning through interaction, reflection, and collaboration between teachers and students. Therefore, improving Sharaf instruction requires strengthening two-way communication, incorporating contextualized methods, and applying constructivist strategies that foster active learner engagement.

Table 2: Perception Gap between Lecturers and Students in the Teaching of Sharaf

Aspect	Lecturer's Perspective	Student's Perspective	Analysis & Implications
Learning Focus	Curriculum-oriented, focused on academic achievement	Desire learning aligned with learning styles and practical needs	Need for planning responsive to students' characteristics and needs
Teaching Methods	Consider memorization and drilling effective	Perceive methods as monotonous, fast-paced, and unhelpful for real context	Innovation needed toward more contextual and communicative methods
Root Cause	Students lack discipline and seriousness (lecturer view)	Material too abstract, non-contextual, and irrelevant (student view)	Need for learning approach linking theory and practice
Classroom Communication	One-way communication, lecturer as primary information source	Lack of discussion and feedback	Need for two-way interaction and active participation
Ideal Approach	Some lecturers	Students seek active	Constructivist approach

	unaware of constructivist importance	involvement	fosters collaboration and meaning-making
Implications	Pedagogical training needed; curriculum more flexible and contextual	Lecturers should foster dialogue, reflection, and application in real context	Shift <i>Sharaf</i> teaching to contextual, student- centered models

The table above illustrates that the gap between lecturers and students in the teaching of Sharaf at the Arabic Education Study Program of IAIN Kerinci stems from differences in focus, methods, and expectations within the learning process. Lecturers tend to emphasize curriculum requirements and student discipline, whereas students perceive the teaching approach as monotonous, abstract, and not relevant to real language use. The lack of two-way communication and minimal contextual approaches widen the understanding gap between both parties. Therefore, a pedagogical transformation is needed through the renewal of teaching methods that are more participatory, contextual, and learner-centered to create a more meaningful and effective learning experience.

Toward a Contextual and Learner-Centered Model of Sharaf Pedagogy

The importance of developing a contextual and student-centered Sharaf learning model to address cognitive and pedagogical challenges has been emphasized (Muhajirunnajah, 2019). In the teaching of Sharaf at the Arabic Education Study Program of IAIN Kerinci, this study shows that the dominant traditional approach which focuses heavily on memorization and drilling of morphological rules often fails to effectively help students understand the practical application of morphological rules in Arabic. Therefore, the findings highlight the need for a more contextual learning model that can connect Sharaf theory with real-life language use situations.

In this context, a student-centered learning model is highly relevant. This means that the learning process should prioritize the active involvement of students by encouraging them to construct their own knowledge through practical application and reflection. Such a model aligns with the constructivist approach, which emphasizes that effective learning occurs when students engage in experiences that enable them to connect theoretical concepts with real-world applications (Rati et al., 2017).

To improve students' grasp of Arabic morphology, the Sharaf teaching model can incorporate several strategies: using authentic texts to contextualize morphological patterns; integrating Sharaf with reading and speaking skills to enhance practical understanding; promoting collaborative learning through discussions and group work; and applying individualized, technology-supported learning to accommodate different paces and needs. The implications of these findings are highly significant for improving

the quality of Sharaf learning at IAIN Kerinci. As an initial step, curriculum renewal is needed to better accommodate contextual and student-centered approaches. Sharaf instruction should not only prioritize memorization of rules but also integrate theory with practice through the use of authentic texts and other language skills. This integration will greatly assist students in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of Arabic language usage.

Furthermore, lecturers need to receive more comprehensive pedagogical training on implementing contextual and student-centered learning models. By understanding concepts such as constructivist learning and task-based learning, lecturers will be better equipped to apply more innovative and relevant methods that meet students' needs. Additionally, the provision of more contextualized teaching materials and the integration of educational technology will greatly assist in addressing existing pedagogical challenges. A more flexible learning approach, which allows students to study not only within the classroom but also outside of it through digital learning resources, can enhance their understanding of Sharaf and its application in everyday communication. Building on the preceding findings, Figure 4 proposes an integrative model designed to address both cognitive and pedagogical challenges in Sharaf learning.



Figure 4. The Collaborative Learning Pyramid Model at IAIN Kerinci

As illustrated in Figure 4, the model integrates cognitive, contextual, and visual dimensions to support deeper learning. It combines gradual presentation of morphological patterns, concept-based visualization, and contextualized application to balance cognitive load and foster schema development. This framework aims to transform Sharaf instruction from memorization-based learning into an interactive, concept-driven process that enhances students' morphological awareness and communicative competence.

Overall, this study emphasizes that improving Sharaf learning at IAIN Kerinci requires a more contextualized and student-centered teaching model. This includes the use of authentic texts, integration with other language skills, collaborative learning, and individualized approaches. By adopting these strategies, it is expected that students will not only master the theoretical aspects of Sharaf but also be able to apply them in more authentic and communicative Arabic language practices.

4. CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the need to re-evaluate pedagogical approaches in teaching Sharaf (Arabic morphology) within higher education. It aimed to identify cognitive and pedagogical challenges that hinder students' mastery of Arabic morphology. The findings show that difficulties in understanding abstract morphological patterns, challenges in linking theory to practice, and cognitive overload due to complex information are key barriers. Traditional teaching methods that focus on memorization rather than conceptual understanding further reinforce these difficulties.

The study contributes to Arabic grammar pedagogy by integrating cognitive and psycholinguistic perspectives to explain how learners process and internalize morphological knowledge. It provides new insight into the interaction between cognitive barriers and instructional design, highlighting the importance of aligning pedagogy with students' mental capacities.

Practically, the study recommends a shift toward communicative, contextual, and student-centered Sharaf instruction that connects grammatical theory with real language use through visual aids, authentic texts, and interactive tasks. Although limited by sample size and institutional scope, the study offers a foundation for future research exploring technology-assisted or cognitive-based models for Arabic morphology learning. In essence, this research contributes both theoretically and practically by promoting a more humanistic and cognitively grounded approach to Sharaf pedagogy.

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