

SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE WORD RAHMAH IN THE QUR'AN A THEMATIC INTERPRETATION PERSPECTIVEKamarul Zaman¹¹ Riau Islands College of Al-Qur'an Studies, Batam, Indonesia**Corresponding Author:**

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Abstract

The concept of rahmah in the Qur'an is often understood narrowly as divine mercy, overlooking its broader semantic and theological dimensions. This study aims to describe the lexical and relational meanings of the term rahmah in the Qur'an through a semantic approach, analyze its conceptual network alongside related terms such as maghfirah, adzab, ni'mah, and hidayah, and construct an integrated understanding through thematic tafsir (tafsir maudhu'i). Employing a qualitative library research design, this study analyzes Qur'anic verses containing the term rahmah using semantic field theory and thematic interpretation. Data were collected from primary sources—the Qur'an and classical and contemporary tafsir works—and secondary literature on Qur'anic semantics and thematic exegesis. The findings reveal that rahmah functions as a multidimensional principle embedded within an interconnected semantic system, shaping not only theological discourse but also ethical and social directives. The semantic analysis demonstrates that rahmah serves as an epistemological axis that aligns with divine attributes and governs the moral structure of human relationships. Through thematic tafsir, this research formulates a comprehensive concept of rahmah as a foundational value in the Qur'anic worldview, which carries significant implications for contemporary interpretation oriented toward inclusivity, social justice, and peacebuilding. These results affirm the necessity of semantic approaches in Qur'anic studies to move beyond atomistic readings and toward a holistic, value-driven understanding.

Keywords: Qur'anic Semantics, Rahmah, Thematic Tafsir

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INTRODUCTION

The term rahmah is one of the most frequently mentioned concepts in the Qur'an, appearing in various contexts such as attributes of Allah (Asma al-Husna), interpersonal relationships, and natural phenomena (Arisha, 2020). In common understanding, the word is often interpreted simply as “mercy” or “compassion,” without considering its broader semantic dimensions (Ismail, 2022a). However, within the Qur'anic semantic framework, rahmah does not stand alone; rather, it is embedded within a complex semantic network. This term is closely related to other key concepts such as maghfirah (forgiveness), 'adzab (punishment), and ni'mah (blessing), making a reductive interpretation problematic. Therefore, a deeper semantic analysis of rahmah is essential to uncover the comprehensive meaning intended by the Qur'an.

Literature reviews indicate that previous studies on the concept of rahmah in the Qur'an primarily employed classical tafsir approaches or general linguistic analyses. For instance, many exegetes describe rahmah merely as a divine attribute associated with forgiveness and the granting of favors (Mubarak, 2020; Pirol & Mutakabbir, 2022). While such interpretations provide an initial understanding, they fail to address the semantic interconnections that form the Qur'anic worldview. Modern semantic approaches—particularly Toshihiko Izutsu's method—have rarely been applied to examine rahmah in depth (Fahimah, 2020; Ismail, 2022b; Karlina, 2025). This method, however, offers the potential to reveal relational meanings within the Qur'anic conceptual system, thereby producing a more holistic understanding. This gap represents an important research niche, considering the need for an approach that integrates linguistic and theological dimensions simultaneously.

This study aims to achieve four main objectives. First, to describe the lexical and relational meanings of the term rahmah in the Qur'an through a semantic approach. Second, to analyze the semantic network of rahmah and its interconnections with related concepts such as maghfirah, 'adzab, ni'mah, and hidayah. Third, to present a thematic tafsir (maudhu'i) perspective in order to construct a comprehensive concept of rahmah in accordance with the Qur'anic worldview. Finally, to explore the implications of semantic analysis for developing contemporary exegesis centered on the value of mercy, thereby contributing to discourses on humanity, peace, and social ethics in the modern context.

The significance of this research lies in its effort to explore the concept of rahmah comprehensively so that its interpretation is not limited to theoretical discussions but can also be applied to address humanitarian challenges. Based on the aforementioned facts, reducing rahmah to a mere notion of “compassion” without considering its theological and moral connections risks producing biased interpretations. By employing Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic approach—focused on structural meaning and conceptual networks—this study is expected to make a significant contribution to expanding thematic Qur'anic exegesis. Therefore, this research is crucial in developing an interpretive framework that is both socially responsive and faithful to the authentic meanings of the Qur'an.

The concept of rahmah in the Qur'anic context is generally understood as compassion, mercy, and the granting of blessings from Allah to His creation (Nurhayat, 2025; Rahmatullah, 2022; Sarumpaet, 2020). Etymologically, the term originates from the root word rahima (رَحِمَ), which denotes a sense of tenderness or empathy. In the field of Qur'anic exegesis, rahmah is not confined to an emotional state but extends to practical actions that produce goodness and well-being (Chasan dkk., 2025; Utari dkk., 2024). Scholars emphasize that rahmah in the

Qur'an carries both theological and moral dimensions, reflecting the relationship between God and His creation as well as human-to-human interactions (Jamil & Rhain, 2025; Suratin dkk., 2025). Therefore, its meaning cannot be detached from its textual context, as it often appears with layered significances shaped by linguistic and theological settings. This definition underscores that rahmah is a central concept representing the universal Qur'anic principle of mercy and justice within human existence.

The manifestations of rahmah in the Qur'an can be categorized into several forms that illustrate its broad semantic scope. First, rahmah as an attribute of Allah, exemplified in the Divine Names such as Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim, signifies absolute and boundless mercy. Second, rahmah in interpersonal relationships, expressed through mutual care, assistance, and respect. Third, rahmah as divine blessings and favors, including life, sustenance, and health granted to creation. Fourth, rahmah as guidance, wherein the Qur'an itself is described as a mercy for mankind. These categories demonstrate that rahmah is not an abstract concept but one that manifests across spiritual, social, and material dimensions. Understanding these manifestations is crucial for interpreting rahmah in accordance with the comprehensive semantic structure of the Qur'an.

Qur'anic semantics refers to a linguistic approach that explores the meaning of words in the Qur'an through their relational connections within a conceptual network. Toshihiko Izutsu, a leading scholar in this field, defines Qur'anic semantics as the study of the semantic structure that constitutes the Qur'anic worldview (Qur'anic Weltanschauung). This approach goes beyond analyzing the lexical meaning of a word, emphasizing its contextual meaning and dynamic relationships with other terms. Qur'anic semantics stresses the necessity of historical and contextual analysis, ensuring that meanings are understood within the Qur'an's conceptual system. Thus, this method provides a robust theoretical framework for uncovering the divine message in depth, surpassing traditional approaches that often lean toward literal interpretation.

The application of Qur'anic semantics can be categorized into several analytical stages. First, the analysis of basic meaning, which traces the original sense of a term in classical Arabic before its Qur'anic usage. Second, the analysis of relational meaning, identifying interconnections between terms within a semantic network. Third, contextual analysis, which examines the meaning based on the placement of the word in specific verses. Fourth, the analysis of semantic transformation, focusing on shifts in meaning when integrated into the Qur'anic conceptual system. These analytical stages enable researchers to uncover deeper layers of meaning beyond the lexical level, integrated within the theological and normative framework of the Qur'an.

Thematic exegesis, or tafsir maudhu'i, is a method of interpreting the Qur'an by compiling all verses related to a specific theme for comprehensive analysis (Amin dkk., 2025). This method aims to achieve a holistic understanding of a concept dispersed throughout various chapters and verses. Scholars define thematic tafsir as a systematic approach that organizes thematically connected verses into a unified interpretative framework, producing a consistent conceptual understanding (Akbar, 2021a; Ardiansyah dkk., 2025; Hanifah, 2024). Unlike tafsir tahlili, which interprets verse by verse, thematic tafsir focuses on extracting thematic meanings such as those concerning mercy, faith, or justice (Sumarno dkk., 2025). Consequently, this method allows readers to acquire a more structured understanding of Qur'anic messages aligned with the contextual demands of contemporary times.

The manifestations of thematic tafsir can be observed in two main approaches. The first is the global approach, which studies a broad theme by correlating it with all relevant verses to formulate universal principles. The second is the partial approach, which concentrates on specific sub-themes to provide in-depth conceptual analysis. Furthermore, the implementation of thematic tafsir typically involves methodological steps such as determining the theme, collecting related verses, analyzing semantic correlations, and synthesizing conceptual conclusions (Akbar, 2021b; Aziz, 2023; Ni'am, 2025). In its development, thematic tafsir has

become increasingly relevant for addressing contemporary challenges, as it bridges normative Qur'anic messages with social realities. Thus, this method plays a strategic role in establishing a contextual and solution-oriented interpretive framework.

RESEARCH METHOD

The primary object of this research is the Qur'anic term *rahmah*, which frequently appears in various contexts, including references to the attributes of Allah (Asma al-Husna), interpersonal relationships, and natural phenomena. In common interpretation, the meaning of *rahmah* is often reduced to the notion of "compassion," without considering its broader semantic implications. However, within the Qur'anic linguistic system, the term *rahmah* does not exist in isolation; rather, it is interconnected with other key concepts, forming a semantic field. Its relationships with terms such as *maghfirah* (forgiveness), *'adza* (punishment), and *ni'mah* (blessing) highlight its complex and multidimensional character. An analysis of these interconnections is essential to prevent interpretive reductionism. Furthermore, most previous studies have approached *rahmah* from classical exegetical or general linguistic perspectives, with limited application of modern semantic analysis methods, particularly Toshihiko Izutsu's approach, which explores the Qur'anic worldview. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of *rahmah* through thematic exegesis and semantic analysis is crucial for responding to contemporary issues such as humanitarian values, peace, and social ethics.

This research employs a qualitative library-based method, focusing on the analysis of written sources and literature relevant to the study's objectives. The primary data consist of Qur'anic verses containing the term *rahmah* and related thematic verses, along with authoritative classical and contemporary tafsir works that provide interpretations of these verses. Additionally, secondary data include scholarly literature on Qur'anic semantics, thematic exegesis, and conceptual studies of *rahmah* sourced from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous academic research. These data sets collectively serve to construct a comprehensive semantic and thematic understanding of *rahmah* in the Qur'anic discourse. The reliance on both primary and secondary data ensures that the analysis is grounded in authentic textual evidence while engaging with current academic discourse in Qur'anic studies.

The theoretical foundation of this research draws upon three major frameworks. First, Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic theory, which includes: (1) Semantic Field Theory, positing that every word derives meaning through its relation to other words in a conceptual network; (2) Relational Meaning, emphasizing that meaning is determined by systemic relationships rather than isolated lexical definitions; and (3) Worldview Analysis, which seeks to uncover the Qur'anic *Weltanschauung* through key conceptual terms. Second, the theory of Thematic Tafsir (Tafsir Maudhu'i), which involves collecting all verses related to a particular theme—such as *rahmah*—and systematically analyzing them to construct an integrated conceptual understanding. Third, the Qur'anic Linguistic Approach, which focuses on examining the root of the word *rahima* (ر ح م) in classical Arabic and its contextual usage in the Qur'an, supported by grammatical and syntactical analysis to reveal nuanced meanings. These frameworks serve as the interpretive lenses for conducting a comprehensive semantic and thematic analysis.

The process of data collection in this research follows systematic stages aligned with the nature of a library-based study. Data were obtained primarily through the examination of Qur'anic texts and relevant exegetical works, as well as contemporary scholarly discussions. The collection involved extensive reading and critical review of written sources such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, academic papers, research reports, and reputable online publications. This comprehensive approach ensures that the gathered data not only represent traditional interpretive perspectives but also incorporate modern semantic and methodological insights. The selection of sources was based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the conceptual understanding of *rahmah* in the Qur'anic framework.

The data analysis in this study employs content analysis, aimed at systematically examining and interpreting textual materials to identify key patterns, relationships, and conceptual structures. The analysis began with lexical examination of the term *rahmah*, followed by relational mapping to other related concepts such as *maghfirah*, *‘adzab*, and *ni‘mah*. Subsequently, the study applied Izutsu’s semantic method to explore the basic, relational, and contextual meanings of the term within the Qur’anic semantic field. This process involved iterative reading, categorization, and synthesis to produce a comprehensive thematic interpretation aligned with the Qur’anic worldview. By integrating semantic analysis with thematic tafsir, the research ensures a rigorous and holistic approach to understanding *rahmah* in both linguistic and theological dimensions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature review on the concept of *rahmah* reveals that the term appears extensively in the Qur’an with diverse semantic dimensions. It is commonly understood as mercy, compassion, or loving-kindness, and is frequently attributed to Allah as one of His essential attributes, as reflected in the names *Ar-Rahman* and *Ar-Rahim*. However, *rahmah* is not limited to divine qualities but also encompasses interpersonal relations and the natural order. Classical exegetical sources describe *rahmah* as an essential principle guiding divine law, moral conduct, and social harmony. This broad conceptualization positions *rahmah* as a fundamental axis in the Qur’anic ethical framework, illustrating its theological and social significance.

Further examination of the literature indicates that *rahmah* is consistently connected to key theological and ethical concepts such as forgiveness (*maghfirah*), blessings (*ni‘mah*), and divine punishment (*‘adzab*). Its semantic field suggests a dynamic interplay between mercy and justice, where *rahmah* serves as a mediating principle that upholds divine grace while preserving moral accountability. Sources analyzed in this study emphasize that *rahmah* is both an ontological attribute of God and a normative principle for human conduct. This dual perspective reflects its role in shaping a holistic Qur’anic worldview centered on compassion as a universal value.

The descriptive and explanatory findings highlight a significant gap between the Qur’anic conception of *rahmah* and its practical interpretation in contemporary Muslim societies. While the literature underscores its comprehensive scope, societal understanding often reduces *rahmah* to mere emotional empathy, neglecting its deeper theological and ethical dimensions. This reductionist view limits the transformative potential of *rahmah* in addressing social justice, conflict resolution, and humanitarian issues. Therefore, an in-depth semantic analysis is necessary to recover the original breadth of meaning intended by the Qur’an.

The literature on Qur’anic semantics, particularly in the context of Toshihiko Izutsu’s methodology, identifies semantics as a discipline concerned with the relational meaning of words within a conceptual system. Unlike conventional lexical studies, semantic analysis in the Qur’anic framework investigates how terms acquire meaning through their position in the Qur’anic worldview (*Weltanschauung*). Scholars describe this method as a two-stage process: first, reconstructing the basic meaning of a word and its semantic field; second, situating it within the Qur’anic conceptual structure to uncover its theological and ethical implications. This approach offers a comprehensive understanding of how language operates as a medium for divine guidance.

Further review indicates that the semantic analysis of Qur’anic terms serves not only as a linguistic exercise but also as a theological inquiry. By mapping the interrelationships between words such as *rahmah*, *maghfirah*, and *‘adzab*, this method reveals underlying value systems and normative principles embedded in the Qur’an. The application of Izutsu’s approach to Qur’anic exegesis enables researchers to move beyond surface meanings and access the deep structures of meaning that shape Islamic ethics and law. This makes semantic analysis an

indispensable tool for modern Qur'anic studies seeking to articulate a coherent vision of Islamic values.

The correlation between semantic theory and the research problem becomes evident when considering the limitations of traditional interpretations that prioritize literal meaning over conceptual interrelations. While classical exegesis provides valuable insights, it often lacks the systematic framework needed to uncover the Qur'an's worldview comprehensively. Semantic analysis bridges this gap by revealing how the concept of *rahmah* interacts with other theological notions, offering a nuanced understanding necessary for addressing contemporary ethical challenges. This reinforces the relevance of semantics as a methodological foundation for thematic exegesis.

The review of thematic exegesis (*tafsir maudhu'i*) literature shows that this approach organizes Qur'anic verses around specific themes to construct a unified conceptual framework. Unlike traditional *tafsir tahlili* that follows the Qur'anic order sequentially, thematic interpretation synthesizes dispersed verses into a coherent discourse on a given topic. Scholars argue that this method enhances contextual understanding and facilitates the integration of Qur'anic values into practical domains such as law, ethics, and social policy. Its systematic nature allows for addressing contemporary issues while remaining faithful to the Qur'anic text.

Further analysis reveals that thematic *tafsir* involves three core processes: identifying and collecting all relevant verses, examining their linguistic, syntactic, and contextual features, and synthesizing them into a unified interpretive framework. This method not only clarifies the internal consistency of Qur'anic discourse but also provides a platform for interdisciplinary engagement with social sciences and humanities. Literature suggests that thematic *tafsir* is particularly effective in addressing complex ethical and societal problems that require an integrative perspective.

The connection between thematic *tafsir* and the research problem is evident in the need for an interpretive approach that can accommodate the complexity of the concept of *rahmah*. Given its multifaceted nature—spanning theology, ethics, and social relations—traditional exegetical methods are insufficient to capture its full meaning. Thematic *tafsir*, combined with semantic analysis, offers a comprehensive methodological framework to reconstruct the Qur'anic concept of *rahmah* in a way that addresses both textual fidelity and contemporary relevance.

Table 1. Research Findings Aligned with Research Objectives

No.	Research Objective	Key Findings
1	Describe the lexical and relational meaning of the term <i>rahmah</i> in the Qur'an using a semantic approach	The term <i>rahmah</i> in the Qur'an exhibits a broad lexical meaning encompassing mercy, compassion, and benevolence. Relationally, it appears in various contexts—divine-human interaction, interpersonal ethics, and cosmic order—signifying multidimensional roles.
2	Analyze the concept of <i>rahmah</i> within its semantic field and its relation to other concepts (<i>maghfirah</i> , <i>adzab</i> , <i>ni'mah</i> , and <i>hidayah</i>)	<i>Rahmah</i> functions as the central node in a semantic network where <i>maghfirah</i> (forgiveness) and <i>ni'mah</i> (blessing) reinforce its positive dimension, while <i>adzab</i> (punishment) stands as its antithesis, and <i>hidayah</i> (guidance) operates as its practical extension.
3	Present the thematic <i>tafsir</i> (<i>maudhu'i</i>) perspective to formulate a holistic concept of <i>rahmah</i> in the Qur'anic worldview	Thematic analysis reveals <i>rahmah</i> as an ontological principle shaping divine attributes and moral obligations. It serves as a foundational value promoting balance between justice and compassion within Qur'anic ethical discourse.

4	Explore the implications of semantic understanding of <i>rahmah</i> for the development of contemporary tafsir oriented toward the value of mercy	Semantic and thematic integration positions <i>rahmah</i> as a transformative paradigm for contemporary interpretation, fostering inclusivity, social justice, and peacebuilding as central components of Qur'anic hermeneutics.
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The findings indicate that the term *rahmah* in the Qur'an encompasses a profound and multidimensional meaning beyond its common interpretation as "mercy" or "compassion." The lexical analysis highlights that its semantic scope is rooted in the triliteral root *rahima* (ر ح م), which conveys notions of care, tenderness, and protection. Relationally, *rahmah* is interconnected with other concepts such as *maghfirah* (forgiveness), *adzab* (punishment), *ni'mah* (blessing), and *hidayah* (guidance), forming a coherent semantic network. Through the thematic exegesis approach, the study identified that the Qur'an employs *rahmah* not only to describe divine attributes but also as a foundational principle in social ethics and human interactions.

When compared to prior studies, this research demonstrates a distinct advantage in employing Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic method, which allows a systematic mapping of Qur'anic worldview. While previous works primarily relied on classical tafsir or linguistic interpretation, they often lacked an integrated framework to reveal inter-conceptual relationships. This study fills that gap by combining semantic field theory with thematic exegesis, resulting in a more holistic understanding of *rahmah*. Consequently, it offers a deeper epistemological perspective, distinguishing it from descriptive analyses that do not address the interconnectedness of Qur'anic concepts.

The results of this study underscore the significance of a comprehensive semantic approach to Qur'anic interpretation. By unveiling the layered meaning of *rahmah*, the research demonstrates its potential to shape interpretative paradigms that prioritize divine compassion as a guiding principle for human conduct. This reflects the broader utility of semantic analysis in reinforcing ethical and humanitarian values derived from the Qur'an, which are increasingly relevant in contemporary discourse on peace, justice, and social harmony.

The implications of these findings extend to the development of thematic tafsir methodologies and contemporary Islamic thought. Understanding *rahmah* as a central concept of divine-human interaction provides a normative basis for framing interpretative responses to global issues such as conflict resolution, human rights, and social welfare. Furthermore, this semantic perspective offers a theoretical foundation for creating interpretative models that align with the Qur'anic ethos of universal mercy, thus contributing to both scholarly discourse and practical applications in Islamic jurisprudence, education, and interfaith dialogue.

The outcomes of this research can be attributed to the methodological synergy between semantic analysis and thematic exegesis, which enables a multidimensional exploration of Qur'anic concepts. Unlike atomistic approaches that treat words in isolation, the semantic method situates terms within their conceptual network, uncovering the Qur'anic worldview. This methodological rigor accounts for the depth and consistency of the findings, demonstrating why the interpretation of *rahmah* in this study transcends conventional lexical definitions.

Based on these findings, future research should further operationalize the semantic framework for other core Qur'anic concepts to establish an integrated thematic lexicon. Additionally, Islamic educational institutions should incorporate semantic approaches into curriculum design to cultivate interpretative competencies that align with the Qur'anic vision of mercy and justice. Practical applications could include developing contemporary fatwas,

ethical guidelines, and community programs grounded in the Qur'anic principle of rahmah, thereby ensuring that interpretations remain responsive to modern socio-ethical challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals a striking and often overlooked reality: rahmah in the Qur'an is not a singular concept of divine mercy as commonly perceived, but a dynamic, multidimensional principle that operates within an interconnected semantic network. Far beyond a passive attribute, rahmah emerges as an active epistemological axis shaping theological discourse, ethical mandates, and social directives. Its relational ties with concepts such as maghfirah, adzab, ni'mah, and hidayah highlight that divine compassion in the Qur'an is not isolated but systematically structured, influencing the entire Qur'anic worldview.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its integration of semantic analysis and thematic tafsir, offering a robust framework for understanding the Qur'an's conceptual architecture. Theoretically, it advances Qur'anic studies by providing a model for exploring meanings through semantic fields rather than atomistic interpretations. Practically, it equips scholars, educators, and policymakers with interpretative tools that emphasize mercy as a foundational principle for contemporary issues such as peacebuilding, social justice, and ethical governance. This dual contribution bridges the gap between abstract theological inquiry and real-world application.

While this study successfully delineates the semantic and thematic dimensions of rahmah, its scope is confined to textual analysis and does not extend to empirical validation of its application in modern interpretative contexts. This limitation, however, signals a fertile opportunity for future research to examine how this semantic framework can inform contemporary fatwas, curriculum development, and socio-ethical policies. Expanding the methodology to include empirical case studies will not only strengthen the practical relevance of semantic analysis but also ensure that Qur'anic interpretation continues to evolve in alignment with the challenges of modern society.

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