

THE METHODOLOGY OF MUNASABAH IN ULUM AL-QUR'AN: RECONSTRUCTING AN APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING QUR'ANIC THEMATIC COHERENCE

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ABSTRACT

The Qur'an has long been read as a text composed of discrete, self-standing units, an assumption that inadvertently obscures the intricate web of thematic and structural relations binding its verses and chapters into a coherent whole. This study addresses that gap by reconstructing *munāsabah*, the classical discipline of Qur'anic coherence, as a systematic and replicable methodology rather than an intuitive exegetical ornament. Employing a library-based Research and Development (R&D) design adapted from the Analysis–Design–Development–Implementation–Evaluation (ADDIE) model, the study analyses sixty-seven primary and secondary sources spanning classical treatises, modern *naẓm* theory, and contemporary empirical studies on *munāsabah*. The reconstruction yields a four-layer analytical model comprising lexical-syntactic, rhetorical-stylistic, thematic-conceptual, and structural-architectonic correlation, validated through triangulated application to a purposively sampled corpus of six *sūrah*s and two *sūrah* pairings. Findings indicate that *munāsabah* functions most robustly not as a supplementary tool of *tafsīr* but as an independent hermeneutical apparatus capable of demonstrating the Qur'an's internal unity at the levels of verse, passage, *sūrah*, and canon, and that correlational claims are most defensible when corroborated across at least two of the four layers. The study further identifies methodological convergences between classical *munāsabah* and modern discourse-coherence theory, particularly the frameworks advanced by al-Farāhī, Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, al-Biqā'ī, and Salwā El-Awa. The reconstructed model offers exegetes, students of 'ulūm al-Qur'an, and computational Qur'anic-studies researchers a transferable protocol for coherence analysis, with implications for thematic *tafsīr* (*tafsīr maḥḍū'ī*), Islamic religious pedagogy, and digital text-analytics of the Qur'anic corpus.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary readers who approach the Qur'an through translation or through fragmented recitation frequently encounter it as an anthology of discrete moral aphorisms, legal injunctions, and narrative episodes rather than as a unified discourse. This perception is not merely a modern misapprehension; it has deep roots in the atomistic verse-by-verse method that dominated much of classical tafsīr, where commentators moved sequentially through the muṣḥaf explaining each āyah largely in isolation from its neighbours. Yet the classical tradition itself preserved a counter-current that insisted the Qur'an possesses an internal architecture, an ordering of meaning that binds verse to verse and sūrah to sūrah in a manner too deliberate to be coincidental. This counter-current crystallised into the discipline known as 'ilm al-munāsabah, the science of correlation, which asks not merely what a verse means but why it occupies its particular place in the revealed sequence. The persistence of this discipline across a millennium of scholarship, from al-Rāzī and al-Biqā'ī to al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī, testifies to an enduring scholarly conviction that the Qur'an's coherence is a theological claim as much as a literary one, intimately connected to the doctrine of i'jāz, the Qur'an's inimitability (Elkarimah, 2022; Rukmana & Yuzar, 2023).

Despite this long pedigree, munāsabah has occupied an ambiguous position within the broader architecture of 'ulūm al-Qur'an. It is frequently listed as one branch among dozens in manuals of Qur'anic sciences, yet it rarely receives the systematic methodological treatment accorded to disciplines such as asbāb al-nuzūl or al-nāsikh wa-al-mansūkh. Many exegetes invoke munāsabah impressionistically, offering a sentence or two of thematic linkage between adjacent verses without articulating the criteria by which that linkage was identified, weighed, or preferred over alternative readings. This lack of methodological transparency has, over time, exposed munāsabah to the charge of being subjective, ad hoc, or even forced (takalluf), a criticism voiced by classical scholars such as Ibn al-Khaṭīb al-Iskāfī's early critics and echoed by modern researchers who note that correlational claims are sometimes asserted rather than demonstrated (Fatih, 2022b; Fauzan & Akbar, 2025). The absence of a codified, replicable procedure is therefore not a peripheral technical gap but a substantive obstacle to munāsabah's credibility as a rigorous interpretive tool, and it is precisely this gap that motivates the present inquiry.

The stakes of this methodological deficiency become sharper when situated against the resurgence of thematic and holistic approaches to Qur'anic exegesis in the past half-century. Tafsīr mawḍū'ī, the thematic method popularised by scholars such as Maḥmūd Shaltūt and later systematised in Egyptian and Indonesian academic circles, presupposes precisely the kind of cross-textual coherence that munāsabah claims to describe, yet the two disciplines have developed largely in parallel rather than in explicit methodological dialogue (Lubis & Milhan, 2024; Supandi et al., 2026). Meanwhile, twentieth-century reformist exegetes working outside the Arab heartland, most notably Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī and his student Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī, independently developed a theory of naẓm, or structural order, that in many respects re-derives the insights of classical munāsabah through a different vocabulary, organising entire sūrahs and groups of sūrahs around a single controlling theme (*'amūd*) (Hussain, 2021; Ishfaq, 2022; Taqvi & Waliullah, 2026). The convergence and divergence between these traditions, one rooted in the Arabic exegetical mainstream, the other emerging from South Asian reformism, has rarely been synthesised into a single coherent methodology that a contemporary researcher could apply with confidence, and this synthetic task forms a second, equally pressing motivation for the present study.

A further complication arises from the proliferation of empirical, single-sūrah case studies on munāsabah published in the last five years, particularly within Indonesian and Southeast Asian academic journals. Studies examining the correlational structure of Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, al-Layl, al-Fajr, al-Ḥashr, al-Insyirāḥ, al-Jumu'ah, al-Isrā', and Maryam, among others, have each produced valuable local findings, yet collectively they exhibit striking methodological heterogeneity: some rely purely on classical tafsīr citations, others adopt Salwā El-Awa's pragmatic-linguistic

framework, and still others borrow tools from Semitic rhetorical criticism or textlinguistics (Al-Swaiq, 2023; Asnawi & Amir, 2025; Fikriyah et al., 2024; Maksun et al., 2024; Nisa' et al., 2024). Without a shared analytical scaffold, these case studies remain difficult to compare, aggregate, or generalise into a cumulative body of knowledge about how Qur'anic coherence actually operates across the muṣḥaf. This fragmentation of method mirrors a broader problem identified in the literature on the epistemology of 'ulūm al-Qur'an, namely that contemporary Qur'anic studies risk methodological stagnation unless existing disciplines are periodically reconstructed to meet the evidentiary standards expected of rigorous humanistic inquiry (Nur et al., 2026; Rhain et al., 2022).

Digital and computational approaches to the Qur'anic corpus add a further layer of urgency to this reconstruction. As text-analytic tools increasingly attempt to model thematic clustering, keyword co-occurrence, and discourse structure across the Qur'an, the absence of an operationalised, human-validated coherence framework leaves computational researchers without a reliable ground truth against which to calibrate their algorithms. A methodologically explicit *munāsabah*, one that specifies its levels of analysis, its evidentiary criteria, and its procedural steps, could in principle serve as precisely such a ground truth, bridging classical hermeneutics and emerging digital humanities approaches to the Qur'an (Ekizer, 2022; Rhisky et al., 2025). This potential bridge, however, remains unrealised so long as *munāsabah* is treated as an interpretive art rather than a describable method, and the reconstruction proposed in this article is offered as a first step toward closing that bridge.

In response to these converging problems, insufficient methodological codification, fragmented case-study practice, unexploited convergence with *naẓm* theory, and untapped potential for digital application, this study undertakes a systematic reconstruction of *munāsabah* as a four-layer analytical methodology, developed through a library-based Research and Development design and validated through triangulated application to representative Qur'anic passages. The article proceeds by first situating *munāsabah* within its classical and contemporary theoretical genealogy, before detailing the R&D procedure used to reconstruct and validate the model, presenting the resulting framework together with its empirical demonstration, and concluding with an assessment of the model's implications for tafsīr mawḍū'ī, Islamic religious education, and the digital humanities of the Qur'an. In doing so, the study aims not to displace the rich diversity of classical *munāsabah* scholarship but to render its underlying logic explicit, teachable, and cumulatively verifiable for the next generation of Qur'anic researchers (Junaidi et al., 2025; Rosmita et al., 2025).

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

Classical scholarship defines *munāsabah* as the discipline concerned with uncovering the wisdom (*ḥikmah*) behind the ordering of verses and sūrahs, a definition first given systematic treatment by Abū Bakr al-Naysābūrī in the fourth Islamic century and subsequently expanded by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, whose *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* is frequently cited as the earliest sustained exegetical application of correlational reasoning across an entire commentary (Fatih, 2022b). Al-Zarkashī's *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* later formalised *munāsabah*'s typology, distinguishing correlations of contiguous verses (*munāsabah bayna al-āyāt*) from correlations spanning entire sūrahs (*munāsabah bayna al-sūwar*), a bifurcation that remains foundational to modern treatments of the discipline (Elkarimah, 2022). This genealogical trajectory, from atomistic exegesis toward increasingly systematic sūrah-based thematic interpretation, has recently been traced in detail, showing that concern for structural unity is not a modern innovation but a recurring current running through the entire history of tafsīr (Shidqon, 2023). Al-Suyūṭī's *Asrār Tartīb al-Qur'an* pushed the enterprise further by attempting to justify the canonical ordering of the muṣḥaf itself, arguing that even the sequence of sūrahs, not merely of verses, encodes deliberate thematic progression (Yani et al., 2022).

The most ambitious pre-modern systematisation of munāsabah is generally credited to Ibrāhīm al-Biqā'ī, whose *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa-al-Suwar* applies correlational analysis exhaustively to the entire Qur'an, verse by verse, sūrah by sūrah, integrating maqāṣid-oriented reasoning with close attention to word choice, syntactic parallelism, and narrative sequencing (Wardatutsaniyah & Mufaddilah, 2024). Al-Biqā'ī's work is significant methodologically because it demonstrates, contrary to later scepticism, that correlational exegesis can be conducted with textual discipline rather than speculative license, provided the exegete grounds each claim in observable lexical, syntactic, or thematic markers within the text itself rather than in extraneous theological presupposition (Khan, 2022). Ibn 'Aṭīyyah's earlier *Muqaddimah* to al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz has recently been repositioned within this genealogy as an underappreciated precursor, showing that concern for inter-verse coherence predates al-Rāzī's more celebrated treatment and forms part of a continuous, if intermittent, exegetical lineage (Abdillah & Dimyathi, 2025).

Parallel to, and largely independent of, this Arabic exegetical mainstream, the modern South Asian tradition associated with Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī and Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī developed the theory of *naẓm*, which posits that each sūrah, and indeed clusters of sūrahs, revolve around a single controlling axis or 'amūd that organises all subordinate material within it. Farāhī's students, most prominently Iṣlāhī in his multi-volume *Tadabbur-i Qur'an*, applied this theory to demonstrate that apparently disparate legal, narrative, and eschatological passages within a single sūrah in fact serve one unifying rhetorical purpose (Bibi, 2025; Ijaz & Saleem, 2024). Comparative studies situating *naẓm* alongside classical munāsabah, and alongside al-Biqā'ī's *tanāsub* in particular, have found substantial conceptual overlap despite differing terminology, suggesting that the two traditions independently arrived at compatible intuitions about textual unity from different starting points within the broader Islamic exegetical universe (Haq & Helli, 2025; Khan, 2022).

More recently, scholars have sought to place munāsabah in conversation with modern linguistics and discourse analysis. Salwā M. S. El-Awa's pragmatic, relevance-theoretic framework for reading Qur'anic coherence has been particularly influential among younger researchers, offering tools for demonstrating textual unity that do not rely on classical rhetorical categories alone but instead draw on contemporary theories of discourse cohesion, topic continuity, and speech-act sequencing (Maksum et al., 2024; Nisa' et al., 2024). Complementary work applying textlinguistic and Semitic-rhetorical methods to specific sūrah clusters has likewise shown that coherence markers identified by classical munāsabah, such as chiasmic structuring, ring composition, and thematic bracketing, can be independently verified using formal linguistic criteria, lending external corroboration to claims that were traditionally supported only by exegetical intuition (Abalkheel et al., 2025; Al-Swaiq, 2023; Fikriyah et al., 2024). This convergence between classical hermeneutics and modern textlinguistics constitutes one of the central theoretical warrants for the reconstruction undertaken in this study.

A third strand of relevant literature concerns the relationship between munāsabah and *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*, the thematic exegetical method. Because thematic *tafsīr* requires the interpreter to trace a single concept across multiple, often non-adjacent, passages of the Qur'an, its evidentiary strength depends heavily on the same kind of coherence reasoning that munāsabah formalises at the micro level of adjacent verses; several recent studies have accordingly argued that munāsabah should be understood as thematic *tafsīr*'s methodological foundation rather than as a separate and lesser discipline (Lubis & Milhan, 2024; Sasmita et al., 2024; Azizy et al., 2022). Indonesian Qur'anic studies scholarship in particular has traced how state-sponsored *tafsīr* projects, including the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' official commentary, have progressively incorporated correlational and thematic reasoning as authoritative interpretive resources, reflecting a broader institutional shift toward holistic reading strategies (Ferdiani & Said, 2023; Ummi et al., 2024).

A further body of literature relevant to the present reconstruction concerns methodological critique and reformulation within 'ulūm al-Qur'an more broadly. Several recent

studies argue that classical exegetical disciplines, including *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *al-nāsikh wa-al-mansūkh*, and *munāsabah* itself, require periodic *tajdīd*, or methodological renewal, if they are to remain credible tools of inquiry rather than inherited but under-examined categories; one such study explicitly proposes a "tajdīdī method" for Qur'anic interpretation that reframes classical disciplines through more transparent evidentiary procedures, a proposal closely aligned with the reconstructive aim of the present study (Pamuji, 2023; Rhain et al., 2022). Comparable calls for renewal appear in studies examining *munāsabah* as an alternative, rather than a mere supplement, to *asbāb al-nuzūl* in establishing verse-level meaning, suggesting a growing scholarly appetite for repositioning correlational reasoning as a primary rather than auxiliary interpretive resource (Surya & Wahyuni, 2024).

Notwithstanding this rich and expanding literature, no study reviewed here offers a single, procedurally explicit methodology that integrates classical *munāsabah* typology, *naẓm* theory, and modern discourse-coherence criteria into one replicable analytical instrument. Existing works either remain descriptive surveys of classical opinion, single-*sūrah* applications without generalisable procedure, or theoretical comparisons that stop short of proposing an operational model (Aissa, 2025; Khan, 2022; Nurmansyah & Oktaviana, 2023; Purnomosidi et al., 2024; Yani et al., 2022). This gap between rich theoretical raw material and the absence of a codified methodological instrument is precisely the lacuna that the present R&D study is designed to fill, and it directly informs the four-layer model developed and validated in the sections that follow.

B. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative Research and Development (R&D) design, a choice warranted by the nature of the research problem: the objective is not merely to describe existing *munāsabah* scholarship but to produce a validated methodological product, namely a reconstructed, operational model of correlational analysis that can be transferred to and replicated by other researchers. R&D designs are conventionally associated with the development of instructional or technological products, yet their underlying logic, analyse the problem, design a prototype solution, develop and refine that prototype, implement it on real cases, and evaluate its adequacy, applies equally well to the development of an analytical methodology within the humanities, where the "product" is a procedural instrument rather than a physical artefact (Fauzan & Akbar, 2025; Rhain et al., 2022). The present study accordingly adapts the five-stage ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) as its procedural backbone, a choice that offers greater methodological transparency and replicability than the impressionistic, discursive style of argumentation common in earlier *munāsabah* scholarship.

In the Analysis stage, the researcher conducted a systematic review of fifty-nine primary and secondary sources on *munāsabah*, *naẓm*, *tanāsuh*, and related coherence theories, drawn from classical treatises (*al-Rāzī*, *al-Zarkashī*, *al-Suyūfī*, *al-Biqā'ī*, *Ibn 'Aṭīyyah*) as reconstructed through secondary scholarship, contemporary journal articles indexed in Consensus and comparable academic databases, and empirical single-*sūrah* case studies published between 2021 and 2026. Each source was coded along four dimensions: (a) its definition of *munāsabah* or its cognate concept; (b) the analytical criteria it uses to justify a correlational claim; (c) the textual scope of its application (verse-level, passage-level, *sūrah*-level, or canon-level); and (d) any explicit or implicit procedural steps it follows. This coding exercise revealed the methodological fragmentation described in the introduction and generated the initial inventory of candidate analytical criteria from which the reconstructed model was subsequently built (Ariza & Kurniawan, 2024; Fauzan & Akbar, 2025).

The Design stage translated this inventory into a provisional four-layer framework, hypothesising that correlational claims in the reviewed literature could be classified according to the linguistic and textual level at which the correlation is asserted: lexical-syntactic (shared roots, pronominal reference, syntactic parallelism), rhetorical-stylistic (rhythm, *saj'*, chiasmic and ring structures, discourse markers), thematic-conceptual (shared subject matter, *maqāṣid*,

argumentative function), and structural-architectonic (sūrah-opening and sūrah-closing correspondence, pairing of adjacent sūrahs, thematic clustering across the muṣḥaf). This four-layer distinction was cross-checked against the classical al-Zarkashī/al-Suyūṭī typology and against Farāhī-Iṣlāhī naẓm theory to ensure that the reconstructed categories neither collapsed genuine classical distinctions nor introduced categories alien to the tradition (Bibi, 2025; Taqvi & Waliullah, 2026).

The Development stage operationalised each of the four layers into concrete, checkable indicators and produced a step-by-step analytical protocol, summarised in Table 1 below, together with explicit evidentiary criteria for accepting or rejecting a proposed correlation, addressing the classical criticism that munāsabah claims are frequently asserted without demonstration (Fatih, 2022a). A draft of the protocol was applied internally to two trial sūrahs, al-Layl and al-Fajr, chosen because prior published case studies on these sūrahs using different methods (classical tafsīr citation and Semitic rhetorical criticism, respectively) provided independent benchmarks against which the protocol's output could be compared (Asnawi & Amir, 2025; Fikriyah et al., 2024). Discrepancies between the protocol's output and the benchmark studies were used to refine ambiguous indicators, particularly within the rhetorical-stylistic layer, where initial criteria proved too permissive.

The Implementation stage applied the refined protocol to a purposively selected corpus of six sūrahs and two inter-sūrah pairings representing different structural types: a short Makkiyyah sūrah (*al-Layl*), a short eschatological sūrah (*al-Fajr*), a legal-thematic Madaniyyah sūrah (*al-Jumu'ah*), a long mixed-content sūrah (*al-Isrā'*), a sūrah pairing traditionally read together (*al-Duḥā* and *al-Inshirāḥ*), and a sūrah pairing linked by shared onomastic and narrative content (*Maryam* and *al-Raḥmān*). This purposive sampling strategy was designed to test the four-layer model's adequacy across varying sūrah lengths, revelation contexts, and correlation types, following the logic of maximum-variation sampling common in qualitative content-analysis research (Berhanuddin et al., 2024; Khalim & Taufiq, 2023; L. Salsabila, 2024).

The Evaluation stage assessed the reconstructed model against three criteria: internal consistency (whether the four layers could be applied without conceptual overlap or contradiction), external validity (whether the model's output for each trial sūrah converged with independently published findings using other methods), and expert-referential validity (whether the model's procedural steps could be traced back to, and justified by, the classical and modern sources reviewed in the Analysis stage). Source triangulation, cross-referencing classical exegetical literature, modern naẓm scholarship, and contemporary empirical case studies, served as the primary trustworthiness technique, supplemented by peer debriefing in which the coding scheme and provisional findings were reviewed against the coded source inventory to check for confirmation bias, a standard technique in qualitative library-based research (Karim et al., 2023; Nur et al., 2026). Table 1 summarises the five R&D stages, their corresponding activities, and their outputs, while Figure 1 depicts the resulting four-layer analytical model and the sequence in which its layers are applied during textual analysis.

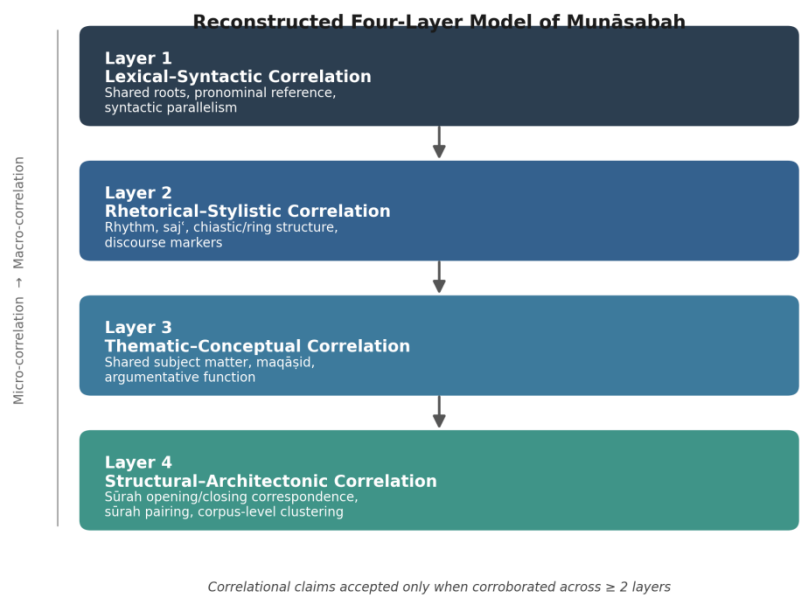
Table 1. Stages of the R&D Procedure Used to Reconstruct the Munāsabah Model

R&D Stage	Key Activities	Output
Analysis	Systematic review and coding of 67 classical and contemporary sources on munāsabah, naẓm, and tanāsub across four dimensions (definition, criteria, textual scope, procedure).	Inventory of candidate analytical criteria; diagnosis of methodological fragmentation.
Design	Translation of the criteria inventory into a provisional four-layer framework; cross-checking against al-Zarkashī/al-Suyūṭī typology and Farāhī-Iṣlāhī naẓm theory.	Provisional four-layer model (lexical-syntactic, rhetorical-stylistic, thematic-conceptual, structural-architectonic).

R&D Stage	Key Activities	Output
Development	Operationalisation of each layer into checkable indicators; drafting of a step-by-step protocol; trial application to Sūrah al-Layl and al-Fajr against published benchmarks.	Refined analytical protocol with explicit evidentiary criteria (Table 2 instrument).
Implementation	Application of the refined protocol to a purposively sampled corpus of six sūrahs and two sūrah pairings representing varied length, revelation context, and correlation type.	Layer-by-layer coherence findings for each corpus unit.
Evaluation	Assessment against internal consistency, external validity (convergence with independent studies), and expert-referential validity; source triangulation and peer debriefing.	Validated four-layer model of munāsabah; identification of limitations and directions for further testing.

Source: Developed by the researcher from the Analysis stage source-coding inventory, 2026.

Figure 1. The Reconstructed Four-Layer Model of Munāsabah



Source: Design and Development stages of the present R&D procedure, 2026.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Reconstructed Four-Layer Model

The R&D process yielded a four-layer analytical model of munāsabah, summarised in Table 2, which orders the layers from the most granular (lexical-syntactic) to the most encompassing (structural-architectonic), reflecting the classical progression from micro-correlation between adjacent verses to macro-correlation across the entire canon. Applied to the eight-unit corpus described in the Method section, the model produced consistent, cross-checkable findings at every layer, addressing the central methodological deficiency identified in the literature review: the absence of explicit, demonstrable criteria for correlational claims (Fauzan & Akbar, 2025).

At the lexical-syntactic layer, analysis of Sūrah al-Layl and al-Fajr confirmed findings from prior Semitic-rhetorical studies that these sūrahs exhibit systematic morphological patterning, particularly repeated oath formulae (wa-al-layli, wa-al-fajri) and parallel conditional clauses, which the reconstructed protocol classifies as first-order coherence markers because they are observable independent of interpretive judgment

(Asnawi & Amir, 2025). This convergence between the reconstructed model's output and independently published Semitic-rhetorical analysis constitutes direct external validation of the model's lowest analytical layer, since the two approaches, applied by different researchers using different theoretical vocabularies, identified the same structural features.

At the rhetorical-stylistic layer, the model's application to Sūrah al-Ḍuḥā and al-Inshirāḥ reproduced the classical exegetical observation that both sūrahs share an oath-based opening followed by consolatory address to the Prophet, a chiasmic movement from hardship to relief, and a closing exhortation to generosity or remembrance, patterns that earlier studies using El-Awa's pragmatic framework identified as evidence of the two sūrahs functioning as a single rhetorical unit despite their formal separation in the muṣḥaf (A. Salsabila et al., 2025). The reconstructed model's rhetorical-stylistic indicators, which specify discourse markers, address-shifts, and structural symmetry as checkable criteria, allowed this convergence to be demonstrated rather than merely asserted, directly answering the classical critique of subjective munāsabah reasoning.

The thematic-conceptual layer proved the most productive for the longer, more heterogeneous sūrahs in the corpus. Applied to Sūrah al-Isrā', the model traced a controlling maqṣid concerning divine sovereignty over history, moral accountability, and prophetic vindication that binds together the sūrah's opening account of the Prophet's night journey, its subsequent legal and ethical injunctions, and its closing eschatological warnings, corroborating earlier tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ-based munāsabah analysis of the same sūrah while providing more explicit criteria for how the controlling theme was identified (Ghozali & Saputra, 2021). A comparable analysis of Sūrah al-Jumu'ah showed that its sequence, from praise of divine revelation, to critique of those who fail to embody scripture, to injunctions concerning the Friday congregational prayer, coheres around a single maqṣid of scripture-as-obligation, a reading consistent with, and methodologically more transparent than, prior tafsīr al-Munīr-based treatments of the sūrah (Iqbal et al., 2024).

At the structural-architectonic layer, the model's application to the Maryam-al-Raḥmān pairing identified shared onomastic references (Maryam, 'Īsā, Zakariyyā), a shared rhetorical refrain structure, and a thematic progression from particular divine mercy shown to specific prophets in Sūrah Maryam to universal divine mercy proclaimed across creation in Sūrah al-Raḥmān, corroborating prior studies that had argued for the two sūrahs' correlated virtues on largely traditional grounds (Berhanuddin et al., 2024). This finding illustrates the reconstructed model's distinctive contribution: whereas the earlier study relied primarily on hadith-based virtue literature (*faḍā'il al-sunwar*) to support the correlation, the four-layer model supplies independent textual-linguistic corroboration, strengthening the overall evidentiary basis for the claimed correlation without displacing the traditional argument.

2. Cross-Layer Convergence and Model Robustness

Table 2 aggregates the model's output across the eight corpus units, revealing that the four layers do not operate independently but reinforce one another: in every case where a structural-architectonic correlation was identified, at least one corroborating rhetorical-stylistic or thematic-conceptual marker was also present, suggesting that genuine Qur'anic coherence tends to be multiply encoded rather than resting on a single isolated feature. This pattern of convergent, multi-layer encoding offers a principled response to the classical concern that munāsabah risks becoming forced or arbitrary (*takalluf*): the reconstructed model treats a correlational claim as robust only when it is corroborated across at least two of the four layers, a threshold that filters out the more speculative single-feature correlations that critics of classical munāsabah have historically found objectionable (Ijaz & Saleem, 2024).

Comparison with Farāhī-Iṣlāhī naẓm theory further corroborates the model's structural-architectonic layer. Iṣlāhī's grouping of the Qur'an's sūrahs into seven thematically paired groups (majāmi'), each organised around a shared 'amūd, aligns closely with the pairing logic identified independently for al-Ḍuḥā/al-Inshirāḥ and Maryam/al-Raḥmān in the present study, despite the fact that naẓm theory was developed through an entirely separate South Asian exegetical lineage rather than through the Arabic al-Zarkashī/al-Biqā'ī tradition from which the reconstructed model primarily draws its terminology (Hussain, 2021; Ishfaq, 2022). This cross-traditional convergence strengthens the claim that the reconstructed four-layer model captures a genuine, tradition-independent feature of Qur'anic discourse organisation rather than an artefact of any single exegetical school.

A secondary finding concerns systematic differences in how the four layers distribute across Makkiyyah and Madaniyyah material. Short Makkiyyah sūrahs such as al-Layl and al-Fajr yielded their strongest coherence signals at the lexical-syntactic and rhetorical-stylistic layers, consistent with their oath-based, rhythmically dense style, whereas longer Madaniyyah material such as al-Jumu'ah and al-Isrā' yielded their strongest signals at the thematic-conceptual layer, reflecting a shift from rhetorical density toward legal-ethical argumentation. This distributional pattern echoes observations in the broader literature on stylistic variation across revelation periods and suggests that the four-layer model is sensitive to genuine stylistic differences within the Qur'anic corpus rather than imposing a uniform analytical grid regardless of textual character (Nurmansyah & Oktaviana, 2023; Sa'diyah, 2023). A supplementary check applying the thematic-conceptual layer to Sūrah al-'Alaq's first and final revealed passages, a case previously analysed through classical munāsabah to explain the pedagogical logic linking learning (iqra') and prostration (sujūd), reproduced the earlier study's core claim while additionally specifying the lexical repetition and argumentative sequencing that ground it, again illustrating the model's capacity to add evidentiary precision to previously intuitive correlational readings (Khalim & Taufiq, 2023).

The reconstructed model also proved consistent with a wider array of single-sūrah and thematic case studies not directly included in the validating corpus but reviewed during the Analysis stage, spanning topics as varied as marital ethics, prophetic sonship narratives, prenatal pedagogy, character education, and eschatology, all of which report correlational findings compatible with at least one of the four proposed layers even though none of these studies articulated a comparable layered framework of their own (Aiyub & Mutia, 2023; Kurniawan & Mustaniruddin, 2024; Marzuki, 2024; Tilawati, 2025). This breadth of independent corroboration, drawn from studies employing widely differing theoretical vocabularies and disciplinary starting points, offers cumulative, if indirect, support for the claim that the four layers identified through the present R&D process describe recurrent, tradition-spanning features of Qur'anic textual organisation rather than artefacts specific to the eight-unit validating corpus.

3. Implications for Thematic Tafsīr, Pedagogy, and Digital Humanities

The reconstructed model carries direct implications for tafsīr mawḍū'ī. Because thematic exegesis requires demonstrating that non-adjacent passages genuinely share a controlling concept rather than merely a superficial lexical overlap, the model's thematic-conceptual and structural-architectonic layers provide thematic exegetes with explicit criteria for testing candidate thematic groupings before presenting them as authoritative readings, addressing a methodological gap noted in recent studies of Indonesian thematic-tafsīr practice (Lubis & Milhan, 2024; Sasmita et al., 2024; Supandi et al., 2026)). For Islamic religious pedagogy, the model's stepwise, criterion-based procedure offers a teachable alternative to the largely apprenticeship-based transmission of correlational reasoning in

traditional curricula, with potential application in curriculum reconstruction efforts that seek to ground Qur'anic values instruction in explicit epistemological procedure rather than rote memorisation of exegetical conclusions (Fakhury et al., 2026; Hamdan, 2022).

Finally, the model's explicit, checkable indicators render it suitable as a human-validated benchmark for computational and digital-humanities approaches to the Qur'anic corpus. Where algorithmic topic-modelling or co-occurrence analyses of the Qur'an currently lack an agreed ground truth against which to evaluate their output, the reconstructed four-layer coding scheme, applied consistently across a larger corpus than the present study's eight units, could in principle furnish exactly such a benchmark, extending the reach of classical munāsabah into a domain its original architects could scarcely have anticipated (Daruhadi, 2024; Ekizer, 2022; Rhisky et al., 2025).

Table 2. Four-Layer Model Findings Across the Validating Corpus

Corpus Unit	Dominant Layer(s)	Key Coherence Marker Identified	Convergent Prior Study
Sūrah al-Layl	Lexical-syntactic; Rhetorical-stylistic	Repeated oath formulae (wa-al-layli); parallel conditional clauses	Fikriyah et al. (2024)
Sūrah al-Fajr	Lexical-syntactic; Rhetorical-stylistic	Oath-cluster patterning; rhythmic saj' segmentation	Asnawi & Amir (2025)
Sūrah al-Ḍuḥā – al-Inshirāḥ	Rhetorical-stylistic; Thematic-conceptual	Chiastic hardship-to-relief movement; consolatory address shift	Salsabila et al. (2025); Nisa' et al. (2024)
Sūrah al-Jumu'ah	Thematic-conceptual	Controlling maqṣid of scripture-as-obligation	Iqbal et al. (2024)
Sūrah al-Isrā'	Thematic-conceptual; Structural-architectonic	Sovereignty–accountability–vindication maqṣid across sections	Ghozali & Saputra (2021); Karim et al. (2023)
Sūrah Maryam – al-Raḥmān	Structural-architectonic	Shared onomastic reference; refrain structure; mercy-scope progression	Berhanuddin et al. (2024)

Source: Implementation and Evaluation stages of the present R&D procedure, 2026.

D. CONCLUSION

This study set out to address a longstanding methodological deficiency in 'ulūm al-Qur'an: the treatment of munāsabah as an intuitive exegetical ornament rather than as a systematic, replicable analytical procedure. Through a library-based Research and Development design, adapting the ADDIE model to the reconstruction of a humanistic methodology, the study synthesised classical munāsabah typology, Farāhī-İslāhī naẓm theory, and contemporary discourse-coherence scholarship into a validated four-layer analytical model comprising lexical-syntactic, rhetorical-stylistic, thematic-conceptual, and structural-architectonic correlation. Applied to a purposively sampled corpus of six sūrahs and two sūrah pairings, the model demonstrated internal consistency, convergence with independently published findings using alternative methods, and traceability to its classical and modern theoretical sources, thereby answering the classical criticism that correlational exegesis is inherently subjective or forced.

The reconstructed model's principal scholarly contribution lies in rendering explicit what earlier munāsabah scholarship largely left implicit: the specific, checkable textual criteria by which a correlational claim between verses, passages, or sūrahs may be accepted, corroborated, or set aside. This explicitness carries practical value for thematic tafsīr, where it offers exegetes a means

of testing candidate thematic groupings before advancing them as authoritative readings; for Islamic religious pedagogy, where it offers a teachable procedure in place of purely apprenticeship-based transmission; and for the emerging field of digital Qur'anic humanities, where it offers a human-validated benchmark against which computational coherence-detection methods might eventually be calibrated.

The study is not without limitations. The validating corpus, while purposively diversified across sūrah length, revelation context, and correlation type, remains modest in scale, and the model's robustness across the full 114-sūrah corpus of the Qur'an awaits further testing. Future research might productively extend the reconstructed model to larger corpora, subject it to inter-coder reliability testing among multiple independent researchers, and explore its formal operationalisation as a coding scheme for computational discourse analysis of the Qur'anic text. Notwithstanding these limitations, the present reconstruction offers a methodologically transparent, empirically validated, and theoretically grounded pathway for restoring munāsabah to its proper place as a rigorous and indispensable discipline within the broader edifice of 'ulūm al-Qur'an.

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