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Article

# Kabir and the Question of Akbar: A Qur'an-Centric Linguistic Analysis of Divine Self-Description of Greatness in the Holy Qur'an

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## Abstract

This study offers a Qur'an-centric linguistic and theological analysis of the root K-B-R in the Holy Qur'an, arguing that the divine self-description of greatness is articulated exclusively through intrinsic, non-comparative forms rather than relational elatives. Grounded in the Qur'anic principles of Tawhīd (absolute divine unity) and Tanzīh (incomparability and transcendence), the research examines whether the widespread devotional expression "Allāhu Akbar" reflects the Qur'an's own mode of divine self-reference. Through qualitative Qur'anic content analysis, including root tracing, morphological examination, and semantic mapping, the study demonstrates that while *al-Kabīr* (الكبير) appears as an established divine attribute within structured naming patterns, the form *Akbar* (أكبر) functions grammatically as an elative, denoting comparative or superlative meaning. The Qur'an does not present *Akbar* as a divine name nor as a self-referential attribute of Allah. Given that comparative constructions imply relational contrast, this study argues that applying an elative form to the Divine may conflict with the Qur'anic doctrine of absolute incomparability. By distinguishing between intrinsic attributes and comparative expressions, the paper contributes to broader discussions on divine naming, theological linguistics, and the authority of Qur'anic self-description in shaping Islamic theology.

**Keywords:** Kabīr; Akbar; Qur'anic linguistics; Tawhīd; Tanzīh; divine attributes; Qur'an-centric theology

## 1. Introduction

Across the global Muslim community, the phrase *Allāhu Akbar* ("God is Greater" or conventionally rendered "God is the Greatest") occupies a central place in ritual, devotional, and socio-religious practice. It is pronounced in the call to prayer (*adhān*), repeated throughout the canonical prayer (*ṣalāh*), invoked in sermons, and frequently employed in everyday religious speech. Over centuries, the expression has come to function not only as a liturgical formula but also, in popular perception, as a de facto divine name. In many contexts, "Akbar" is treated as if it were an established and independent name of God equivalent to the names listed among *Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* (the Most Beautiful Names of God).

However, a careful Qur'an-centric inquiry raises a significant linguistic and theological question: Does the Qur'an itself present "Akbar" (أكبر) as an independent divine name in the same manner as "al-Kabīr" (الكبير), "al-'Azīm" (العظيم), or other self-descriptive attributes? While the Qur'an repeatedly affirms that "He is al-Kabīr" (e.g., Q. 13:9; 22:62; 31:30), the term "Akbar" appears in the comparative form and not as a standalone nominal attribute attached directly to God as a fixed name. The morphological distinction between the elative form (*af'al* pattern: "Akbar") and the intensive adjective (*fa'il* pattern: "Kabīr") may carry significant semantic implications within classical Arabic grammar (Wright, 1896/1971).

The research problem, therefore, is not whether the phrase *Allāhu Akbar* appears in the Qur'an—it does (e.g., Q. 29:45)—but whether its devotional and nominal elevation in post-Qur'anic Islamic practice corresponds precisely to the Qur'an's own mode of divine self-description. More specifically, this study asks:

- How does the Qur'an linguistically deploy the root K-B-R (ك-ب-ر) in reference to God?
- What is the semantic and grammatical distinction between “Kabīr” and “Akbar” in Qur'anic usage?
- To what extent does later devotional usage align with or extend beyond Qur'anic patterns of divine naming?

By situating the inquiry within a Qur'an-centric theoretical framework, this study examines whether the widespread nominalisation of “Akbar” reflects a faithful continuation of Qur'anic discourse or represents a post-Qur'anic theological development.

### 1.1. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies at the intersection of Qur'anic linguistics, theology, and devotional praxis. First, it contributes to Qur'anic lexical studies by undertaking a focused content analysis of the K-B-R root within the Qur'anic corpus. While numerous works have explored Qur'anic vocabulary and semantics (Izutsu, 1964; Rahman, 1980), relatively few studies have isolated specific divine descriptors for morpho-semantic comparison within a Qur'an-centric paradigm.

Second, the study engages with the broader discourse on *Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*. Classical theologians systematised the divine names based on prophetic traditions and theological reasoning (al-Ghazālī, trans. 1992; Ibn al-'Arabī, trans. 1980). However, scholars have debated whether all names commonly included in devotional lists are explicitly established in the Qur'an or derive from hadith-based enumeration (Burrell & Daher, 1992). A Qur'an-centric approach, which prioritises the Qur'an's internal linguistic evidence over later theological systematisation, may yield insights into how divine greatness is articulated in the primary text.

Third, the study is significant for methodological reasons. Contemporary Islamic studies increasingly emphasise textual and linguistic analysis grounded in the Qur'an's own semantic field (Neuwirth, 2010). By employing Qur'anic content analysis and morphological examination, this research aligns with modern academic approaches that seek to distinguish between scriptural language and later doctrinal elaboration.

Fourth, the inquiry has theological implications. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasises that divine attributes are to be affirmed in accordance with revelation (Q. 7:180). Thus, understanding how the Qur'an describes God's greatness bears directly upon theological precision and devotional authenticity. If “al-Kabīr” is explicitly presented as a divine attribute while “Akbar” functions grammatically as a comparative expression (“greater”), the distinction may shape how one conceptualises divine transcendence and absoluteness.

Finally, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about the relationship between scripture and tradition. Islamic intellectual history reflects a dynamic interaction between the Qur'an, prophetic traditions, and later juristic and theological developments (Hallaq, 2009). Examining the linguistic status of “Akbar” within the Qur'an allows for a nuanced evaluation of how devotional formulas evolve and how they relate to scriptural foundations.

### 1.2. Brief Review of the Literature

Scholarly engagement with Qur'anic divine names has a long history. Classical works such as al-Ghazālī's *al-Maṣṣad al-Asnā* provided theological reflections on the divine names, often integrating Qur'anic references with hadith-based enumerations (al-Ghazālī, trans. 1992). Similarly, Ibn al-'Arabī (trans. 1980) explored the metaphysical dimensions of divine attributes, interpreting names as manifestations of divine reality. These works, however, operated within a theological framework that did not always distinguish sharply between Qur'anic lexical forms and devotional expansions.

Modern scholarship has approached Qur'anic vocabulary through semantic and structural analysis. Izutsu (1964) pioneered semantic studies of Qur'anic ethical and theological terms, emphasising the relational structure of key concepts within the Qur'an's worldview. Rahman (1980) further argued that Qur'anic terms must be interpreted within their internal moral and theological coherence rather than through later doctrinal overlays.

Neuwirth (2010) and other contemporary scholars have underscored the literary and rhetorical dimensions of the Qur'an, highlighting how divine self-description functions within the text's communicative strategy. Such approaches support examining morphological patterns—such as the distinction between elative and intensive adjective forms—to discern theological nuance.

Regarding the specific phrase *Allāhu Akbar*, academic discussions often focus on its ritual centrality rather than its linguistic structure (Campo, 2009). While it is widely acknowledged that the phrase appears in the Qur'an, there is limited scholarship critically analysing whether “Akbar” operates as an independent nominal attribute or as a comparative descriptor within specific syntactic constructions.

Arabic grammatical scholarship provides essential tools for this inquiry. Classical grammarians, as synthesised in Wright's (1896/1971) *Grammar of the Arabic Language*, explain that the *af'al* form (e.g., “Akbar”) typically conveys comparison (“greater”) unless contextually absolutised. In contrast, the *fa'īl* pattern (e.g., “Kabīr”) frequently functions as an established qualitative attribute. This morphological distinction may carry theological weight when examining divine self-description.

In sum, while extensive scholarship exists on divine names, Qur'anic semantics, and devotional practice, a focused, Qur'an-centric linguistic comparison between “Kabīr” and “Akbar” remains underexplored. This study seeks to fill that gap by systematically analysing the K-B-R root within the Qur'anic corpus and evaluating how its linguistic deployment informs theological understanding of divine greatness.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Research on *Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*

The study of *Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* (the Most Beautiful Names of God) occupies a central place in Islamic theology, spirituality, and devotional literature. The Qur'an itself provides the conceptual foundation for this discourse, declaring: “To God belong the Most Beautiful Names, so call upon Him by them” (Q. 7:180; cf. Q. 17:110; 20:8; 59:24). While the Qur'an affirms the existence of divine names, it does not enumerate a fixed list of ninety-nine names. The canonical enumeration of ninety-nine names derives primarily from hadith literature, particularly a well-known report recorded in al-Bukhārī and Muslim, though the specific listing varies across narrations (al-Bukhārī, trans. 1997; Muslim, trans. 2007).

Classical theological engagement with the divine names sought to reconcile scriptural fidelity with systematic theology. Al-Ghazālī's *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā* remains one of the most influential works in this genre. In it, he not only explains the meanings of each name but also articulates their ethical and spiritual implications for believers (al-Ghazālī, trans. 1992). For al-Ghazālī, the divine names function as descriptors of God's essence and attributes, but they also serve as paradigms for moral cultivation. However, his treatment does not always distinguish sharply between names explicitly rooted in Qur'anic diction and those derived from prophetic traditions.

Similarly, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in his theological exegesis, explored the philosophical and metaphysical dimensions of divine attributes, often discussing the linguistic forms of names within broader debates on divine essence and attributes (al-Rāzī, 1981). These classical treatments prioritised doctrinal coherence, occasionally subordinating strict lexical analysis to theological synthesis.

Modern scholarship has approached *Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* with greater attention to textual origins and semantic fields. Burrell and Daher (1992) note that the ninety-nine-name tradition reflects a process of devotional codification rather than a Qur'anic enumeration. Gardet (1983) similarly observes that

Islamic theology historically integrated Qur'anic attributes, hadith-based names, and rational theological constructs into a unified doctrine of divine attributes.

A key issue in contemporary scholarship concerns the criteria for identifying a "divine name." Must a term appear in a nominal form directly attributed to God in the Qur'an, or may it be derived from verbal descriptions and theological inference? Some scholars argue that Qur'anic usage should remain normative for establishing divine names (Rahman, 1980), while others accept a broader hadith-based framework (Campo, 2009).

Within this broader discourse, the distinction between "al-Kabīr" (the Great) and "Akbar" (greater) is rarely examined in isolation. "Al-Kabīr" appears explicitly as a divine attribute in multiple verses (e.g., Q. 13:9; 22:62; 34:23), often in conjunction with "al-'Alī" (the Most High), reinforcing its status as an established descriptive name. In contrast, "Akbar" typically appears in comparative constructions, such as "wa-dhikru Allāhi akbar" ("the remembrance of God is greater," Q. 29:45). The absence of "al-Akbar" as a Qur'anically affirmed nominal attribute invites further scrutiny within the broader framework of *Asmā' al-Husnā* research.

Thus, while classical and modern scholarship has extensively explored divine names, relatively little attention has been devoted to the morpho-semantic implications of differentiating between intensive adjectives (*fa'īl*) and elative forms (*af'al*) in divine self-description. This lacuna provides an entry point for the present study.

## 2.2. The Historical Development of "Allāhu Akbar"

The phrase *Allāhu Akbar* holds immense ritual and symbolic significance in Islamic history. Its earliest textual attestations are found within the Qur'an itself (e.g., Q. 9:72; 29:45; 74:3), though the contexts vary. In Q. 74:3 ("And magnify your Lord"), the imperative "fa-kabbir" reflects the same K-B-R root, indicating an act of magnification rather than the establishment of a fixed nominal title.

The formal liturgical centrality of *Allāhu Akbar* developed through prophetic practice and communal ritual formation. Reports indicate that the phrase was incorporated into the *adhān* and prayer formula during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime (al-Bukhārī, trans. 1997). Over time, it became the opening declaration (*takbīrat al-ihrām*) of the canonical prayer, marking entry into a sacred communicative state.

Historically, the phrase also acquired sociopolitical dimensions. During periods of expansion and conflict, it functioned as a rallying cry, symbolising divine transcendence and sovereignty (Donner, 2010). In Sufi traditions, repetitive invocation of the *takbīr* served as a form of *dhikr* (remembrance), reinforcing spiritual consciousness (Schimmel, 1975). Thus, *Allāhu Akbar* evolved beyond a Qur'anic phrase into a comprehensive symbol of Islamic identity.

However, the historical development of devotional language does not necessarily resolve questions of lexical status. While juristic and theological consensus affirms the legitimacy and centrality of the phrase, scholarly analysis must still distinguish between liturgical authority and Qur'anic naming conventions. Hallaq (2009) emphasises that Islamic legal and theological norms often arise from the interplay between scripture and prophetic precedent. In this interplay, phrases that originate as descriptive statements may acquire quasi-nominal status through ritual repetition.

Contemporary academic discussions of *Allāhu Akbar* often focus on its sociopolitical resonance rather than its grammatical structure (Campo, 2009). Yet from a linguistic standpoint, the phrase retains its comparative morphology. Classical Arabic grammar identifies "Akbar" as an elative form typically conveying comparison ("greater" or "greatest") depending on syntactic context (Wright, 1896/1971). Unlike "Kabīr," which functions as a stable qualitative adjective, "Akbar" grammatically presupposes comparison, even when the comparison is implicit.

This grammatical distinction has theological implications. If "Akbar" structurally indicates relational greatness ("greater than"), its liturgical repetition may express divine incomparability rather than assert a fixed nominal attribute. The historical development of the phrase, therefore, illustrates how scriptural expressions can evolve into identity markers while retaining their original linguistic structure.

### 2.3. Research on Qur'anic Linguistics

Modern Qur'anic studies increasingly emphasise linguistic and semantic analysis as keys to understanding the text's theological discourse. Izutsu (1964) pioneered semantic field analysis of Qur'anic vocabulary, arguing that each key term derives meaning from its relational network within the Qur'an's worldview. Applying this approach to the K-B-R root requires examining how "Kabīr," "Akbar," and related derivatives function across contexts.

Rahman (1980) stressed the importance of interpreting Qur'anic concepts holistically rather than atomistically. For Rahman, theological coherence emerges from the Qur'an's internal logic. Thus, analysing divine greatness necessitates examining patterns of self-description rather than isolating individual phrases.

Neuwirth (2010) highlights the Qur'an's rhetorical strategies, noting that divine self-description often serves polemical and didactic purposes. In Meccan passages, assertions of God's greatness challenge polytheistic conceptions, reinforcing absolute monotheism. Within this rhetorical framework, the deployment of "Kabīr" and "Akbar" may reflect distinct communicative functions.

Arabic grammatical scholarship provides additional analytical tools. The distinction between the *fa'īl* and *af'al* patterns is well established (Wright, 1896/1971). The former frequently conveys a permanent quality, while the latter typically indicates comparison or superlativeness. In Qur'anic usage, relative forms sometimes function rhetorically to emphasise transcendence without explicit comparison (e.g., "khayrun" in Q. 2:184). Nevertheless, the morphological category remains semantically marked.

Recent linguistic studies also explore Qur'anic self-referentiality—the way the Qur'an describes its own authority and divine source (Abdel Haleem, 2004). Such approaches underscore the importance of respecting the text's lexical precision when constructing theological claims. If the Qur'an consistently employs "al-Kabīr" as a nominal attribute while using "Akbar" in comparative constructions, the distinction may be deliberate rather than incidental.

In sum, existing scholarship provides substantial resources for analysing divine greatness in the Qur'an but has not fully integrated morphological analysis with theological reflection on devotional usage. Studies of *Asmā' al-Ḥusnā* focus on doctrinal enumeration; historical research traces liturgical evolution; and linguistic scholarship clarifies grammatical categories. Yet a comprehensive synthesis examining the morpho-semantic status of "Kabīr" versus "Akbar" within a Qur'an-centric framework remains underdeveloped.

The present study builds upon these strands of scholarship by combining classical theological insights, historical analysis of ritual development, and contemporary linguistic methodology. Through systematic Qur'anic content analysis, it seeks to clarify how divine greatness is articulated within the primary text and how that articulation relates to subsequent devotional practice.

## 3. Theoretical Framework: Qur'anic Principles

This study is grounded in a Qur'an-centric theoretical framework that derives its analytical categories from the internal principles of the Qur'an itself. Rather than beginning with later theological systematisations or inherited doctrinal constructs, the framework prioritises the Qur'an's own articulation of divine identity and attributes. Three interrelated principles structure this framework: Tawḥīd (Divine Unity), Tanzīh (Divine Transcendence), and Qur'anic Self-Referential Authority. Together, these principles provide the epistemological and hermeneutical basis for examining how the Qur'an linguistically presents divine greatness.

### 3.1. Tawḥīd

Tawḥīd—the affirmation of God's absolute oneness—constitutes the central theological axis of the Qur'an. The proclamation of divine unity is articulated succinctly in Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (Q. 112:1–4), which denies all forms of division, progeny, or equivalence. Tawḥīd in the Qur'an is not merely a

metaphysical assertion but a comprehensive worldview that governs ontology, worship, and language (Rahman, 1980).

From a linguistic perspective, Tawhīd demands precision in divine description. The Qur'an repeatedly rejects associating partners or comparable entities with God (Q. 42:11; 16:74). Consequently, divine attributes must reinforce God's singularity and incomparability. In this regard, the way the Qur'an names and describes God is itself an expression of Tawhīd. The text consistently affirms attributes in forms that emphasise permanence, absoluteness, and uniqueness—such as *al-'Alīm* (All-Knowing), *al-Ḥakīm* (All-Wise), and *al-Kabīr* (The Great).

Izutsu (1964) argues that Qur'anic concepts derive meaning relationally within the broader semantic network of Tawhīd. Divine greatness, therefore, must be interpreted within the Qur'an's monotheistic paradigm. If a term implies relational comparison, its theological significance must be assessed carefully. The relative form "Akbar" (greater) linguistically presupposes comparison, whereas "Kabīr" conveys an inherent quality. Within the logic of Tawhīd, the distinction between absolute and comparative formulations may carry conceptual weight.

Thus, Tawhīd functions as both a theological premise and a linguistic criterion. Any claim about divine naming must align with the Qur'an's overarching insistence on singular, incomparable divinity.

### 3.2. *Tanzīh*

Closely linked to Tawhīd is the principle of *Tanzīh*—the affirmation of God's transcendence beyond human limitation and anthropomorphic projection. The Qur'an consistently negates likeness and equivalence: "There is nothing like unto Him" (Q. 42:11). *Tanzīh* operates through both negation and exaltation, often pairing transcendence with attributes of majesty and greatness.

Neuwirth (2010) observes that Qur'anic rhetoric frequently employs exaltation formulas to distinguish God from created beings. The K-B-R root appears in contexts that contrast divine authority with human weakness or idolatrous claims. For example, God is described as *al-Kabīr al-Muta'āl* (The Great, the Most Exalted) in Q. 13:9, reinforcing transcendence through intensive adjectival forms.

Theologically, *Tanzīh* requires that divine greatness be expressed in ways that avoid anthropomorphic or relative limitation. Classical theologians debated how to affirm attributes without compromising transcendence (Gardet, 1983). Within this discourse, linguistic structure becomes significant. An attribute that suggests comparison may rhetorically emphasise superiority, yet it must ultimately affirm incomparability.

Therefore, *Tanzīh* informs this study by highlighting the need to distinguish between forms that denote inherent, absolute greatness and those that linguistically function within comparative syntax. The Qur'an's consistent use of certain adjectival patterns in divine self-description may reflect its commitment to preserving transcendence at the grammatical level.

### 3.3. *Qur'anic Self-Referential Authority*

The third principle is the Qur'an's self-referential authority. The text repeatedly asserts its own status as the definitive revelation and ultimate criterion (*furqān*) (Q. 25:1). It presents itself as internally coherent and divinely safeguarded (Q. 15:9; 4:82). From a methodological standpoint, this self-claim implies that theological conclusions about divine naming should be grounded primarily in Qur'anic discourse.

Abdel Haleem (2004) emphasises that the Qur'an's style and lexical choices are deliberate and rhetorically purposeful. The recurrence of specific forms in divine self-description may indicate intentional semantic framing. If the Qur'an consistently employs "al-Kabīr" as a nominal attribute while never presenting "al-Akbar" as an established name, such patterns warrant analytical attention.

Rahman (1980) similarly argues that theological coherence must emerge from the Qur'an's internal logic rather than later doctrinal accretions. While prophetic traditions and communal

practices hold normative authority within Islamic jurisprudence, a Qur'an-centric study prioritises scriptural evidence when analysing linguistic self-description.

In sum, Tawhīd establishes the unity and singularity of divine identity; Tanzīh safeguards transcendence and incomparability; and Qur'anic self-referential authority grounds the analysis within the text's own linguistic and theological framework. These principles collectively shape the interpretive lens through which the K-B-R root will be examined.

#### 4. Research Methodology: Qur'anic Content Analysis

This study adopts a Qur'an-self-referential hermeneutic, whereby divine names and attributes are considered theologically normative only insofar as they are explicitly self-ascribed within the Qur'anic discourse. This paper employs Qur'anic content analysis as its primary methodological approach. Content analysis is a systematic and replicable technique for identifying patterns within textual corpora (Krippendorff, 2018). Applied to the Qur'an, it involves examining lexical occurrences, grammatical forms, and semantic contexts within the entire canonical text.

##### 4.1. Corpus Selection

The corpus for this study consists exclusively of the standard Arabic text of the Qur'an. No secondary devotional compilations or post-Qur'anic theological treatises are included in the primary dataset. This delimitation reflects the Qur'an-centric orientation of the research.

All verses containing derivatives of the trilateral root K-B-R (ك-ب-ر) are identified and catalogued. This includes nominal forms (e.g., *Kabīr*), relative forms (e.g., *Akbar*), verbal forms (e.g., *kabbara*), and related participles. The analysis considers each occurrence within its immediate syntactic and rhetorical context.

##### 4.2. Root Analysis (K-B-R Root)

Arabic operates through a root-based morphological system in which trilateral roots generate multiple derivatives across grammatical patterns (Wright, 1896/1971). The K-B-R root fundamentally conveys the concept of greatness, magnitude, or seniority. However, its semantic range varies depending on the morphological pattern and context.

The study begins by identifying the total frequency of K-B-R derivatives in the Qur'an. Each occurrence is categorised according to grammatical form:

- **Fa'īl** pattern (*Kabīr*)
- **Af'al** pattern (*Akbar*)
- Verbal forms (e.g., *kabbara*, *yastakbīrūn*)
- Nouns indicating arrogance or self-aggrandisement (*istikbār*)

This classification enables a quantitative overview of how the root functions across semantic domains—divine description, human arrogance, comparative evaluation, and exhortative command.

##### 4.3. Morphological Examination

Morphological analysis distinguishes between intensive adjectival forms and relative constructions. The *fa'īl* pattern typically denotes a stable, inherent quality (e.g., *'Alīm*, *Ḥakīm*, *Kabīr*). The *af'al* pattern, by contrast, usually expresses comparison or superlative degree, contextually interpreted as "greater" or "greatest" (Wright, 1896/1971).

Each occurrence of "Kabīr" attributed to God is analysed to determine whether it functions as a nominal predicate, an attribute with the definite article (*al-*), or part of a paired construction (e.g., *al-'Alī al-Kabīr*). Similarly, each occurrence of "Akbar" is examined to assess whether it appears in comparative clauses, rhetorical emphases, or liturgical contexts.

The absence or presence of the definite article (*al-*) in connection with "Akbar" is particularly significant. If "al-Akbar" does not occur as a divine name, this may indicate a morphological boundary in Qur'anic self-description.

#### 4.4. Semantic Mapping

Following Izutsu's (1964) semantic field methodology, the study maps the relational meanings of K-B-R derivatives within the Qur'anic worldview. Semantic mapping involves identifying thematic clusters—such as divine transcendence, human arrogance, eschatological contrast, and devotional exhortation—and situating each derivative within these clusters.

For example, occurrences of *al-Kabīr* associated with divine authority are grouped and compared with verses where *Akbar* appears in statements of comparative greatness (e.g., “God is greater than...” implicit or explicit). This mapping clarifies whether the Qur'an reserves certain morphological forms for specific theological functions.

The analysis integrates qualitative interpretation with quantitative frequency assessment. While numerical patterns alone do not determine theological conclusions, consistent morphological usage may suggest intentional semantic differentiation.

#### 4.5. Methodological Rigour

To ensure reliability, the analysis follows transparent criteria:

- All lexical data are derived directly from the Arabic Qur'anic text.
- Grammatical classifications adhere to established Arabic grammar references (Wright, 1896/1971).
- Interpretive conclusions remain grounded in contextual exegesis rather than external doctrinal assumptions.

By combining root analysis, morphological examination, and semantic mapping, this Qur'anic content analysis seeks to provide a systematic and textually grounded evaluation of how divine greatness is linguistically articulated.

### 5. Linguistic Analysis of the K-B-R Root in the Qur'an

The trilateral Arabic root K-B-R (ك-ب-ر) conveys the core semantic field of greatness, magnitude, seniority, and exaltation. In the Qur'an, this root appears in multiple morphological patterns, including intensive adjectives (*fa'il*), elative forms (*af'al*), verbs, and abstract nouns. A Qur'an-centric linguistic analysis requires distinguishing between these morphological patterns and examining how each functions within the text's theological discourse.

This section focuses specifically on two principal adjectival derivatives: *Kabīr* (الكبير) and *Akbar* (أكبر). The former frequently appears as a divine attribute, often in the definite form (*al-Kabīr*), while the latter appears primarily in comparative constructions. The morpho-semantic distinction between these forms is central to understanding how the Qur'an articulates divine greatness.

#### 5.1. Occurrences of *Kabīr* (الكبير)

The adjective *Kabīr* follows the *fa'il* morphological pattern, which in classical Arabic grammar typically denotes a stable, inherent quality (Wright, 1896/1971). When used with the definite article (*al-*), it functions as a nominal attribute signifying an established characteristic.

In the Qur'an, *al-Kabīr* appears explicitly as a divine attribute in several verses. For example:

- “He is the Knower of the unseen and the witnessed, *al-Kabīr al-Muta'al*” (Q. 13:9).
- “That is because God—He is the Truth, and what they invoke besides Him is falsehood, and God—He is *al-'Alī al-Kabīr*” (Q. 22:62; cf. 31:30; 34:23).

In these occurrences, *al-Kabīr* appears in paired constructions, often alongside *al-'Alī* (The Most High). The syntactic structure reinforces absoluteness: the predicate is definitive and qualitative, not comparative. The pairing suggests semantic reinforcement—height (*'ulūw*) and greatness (*kibr*) combine to articulate transcendence.

Importantly, *al-Kabīr* appears in the definite form with the article (*al-*), indicating specificity and established status. In Arabic grammar, the definite article often signals nominalisation and

permanence (Wright, 1896/1971). Thus, *al-Kabīr* operates linguistically as a fixed attribute rather than a relational descriptor.

From a semantic perspective, Izutsu (1964) emphasises that Qur'anic attributes derive meaning from their relational network within the text. *Al-Kabīr* appears in contexts affirming divine sovereignty, authority, and transcendence over creation. The attribute is not presented as "greater than" something else but as inherently Great. The absence of explicit comparison underscores absoluteness.

Moreover, the Qur'an frequently contrasts divine greatness with human arrogance expressed through the same root in verbal form (e.g., *yastakbirūn*, "they act arrogantly"). This contrast establishes a semantic polarity: divine greatness is legitimate and inherent, while human self-exaltation is condemned. Such internal semantic opposition strengthens the theological coherence of *al-Kabīr* as an exclusive divine quality.

Classical exegetes interpreted *al-Kabīr* as denoting absolute majesty and transcendence. While theological elaborations vary, the linguistic form itself remains consistent across Qur'anic occurrences: a qualitative adjective functioning as a nominal divine attribute (al-Rāzī, 1981).

Thus, morphologically and syntactically, *al-Kabīr* functions as an absolute attribute embedded within the Qur'an's system of divine names.

## 5.2. Occurrences of Akbar (أكبر)

In contrast, *Akbar* follows the *af'al* elative pattern, which typically conveys comparative or superlative meaning ("greater" or "greatest") depending on context (Wright, 1896/1971). The elative form is semantically relational; it presupposes comparison, whether explicitly stated or implicitly understood.

The Qur'an contains several instances of *Akbar*. Among the most cited is:

- "And the remembrance of God is *akbar*" (Q. 29:45).

Here, *Akbar* functions within a comparative construction. Classical commentators debate whether the implied comparison is between remembrance and prayer or between remembrance and other acts (al-Rāzī, 1981). Regardless of interpretive nuance, the morphology remains comparative.

Another significant example appears in Q. 9:72:

- "And the pleasure of God is *akbar*."

Again, the term is relational, indicating that divine pleasure surpasses the described blessings of Paradise. The elative form emphasises superiority rather than establishing a nominal attribute.

The imperative form derived from the same root appears in Q. 74:3:

- "And your Lord, magnify (*fa-kabbir*)."

This verbal command reflects exhortation to declare greatness, not the assignment of a specific nominal title.

Notably, the Qur'an does not present "al-Akbar" as a divine name with the definite article. The absence of *al-Akbar* in nominal attribution to God contrasts with the repeated use of *al-Kabīr*. While the phrase *Allāhu Akbar* appears in devotional and ritual contexts, within the Qur'an, the word "Akbar" itself consistently retains comparative morphology.

From a semantic standpoint, the elative form often functions rhetorically to assert incomparability. In classical Arabic usage, the elative may imply absolute supremacy even when comparison is not explicitly stated (Wright, 1896/1971). Even when functioning rhetorically without an explicitly stated comparator, the elative form structurally presupposes relational gradation within Arabic morphology. Its semantic logic remains comparative at the level of linguistic structure, even if no explicit second term is mentioned in discourse.

This distinction is significant for linguistic analysis. Whereas *al-Kabīr* denotes inherent greatness, *Akbar* linguistically communicates surpassing greatness. The former is qualitative; the latter is comparative.

### 5.3. Comparative Degree vs. Absolute Attribute

The distinction between comparative and absolute formulations is central to Arabic morphology. The *fa'īl* pattern (*Kabīr*) typically conveys a stable quality, while the *af'al* pattern (*Akbar*) expresses comparison (Wright, 1896/1971).

In Qur'anic discourse, divine attributes often appear in patterns denoting permanence and absoluteness—*ʿAlīm*, *Ḥakīm*, *Raḥīm*, *Kabīr*. These forms align with the theological principle of divine immutability and inherent perfection (Rahman, 1980). The morphological consistency suggests deliberate lexical selection.

By contrast, elative forms frequently occur in rhetorical or evaluative contexts. For example, “*khayrun*” (better) appears in comparative arguments (Q. 2:184). Similarly, “*akbar*” emphasises superiority within a given discourse context. While such forms may imply ultimate supremacy, they linguistically operate through comparison.

Izutsu (1964) notes that semantic nuance arises not only from lexical roots but also from morphological patterning. The Qur'an's deployment of *al-Kabīr* for divine self-description and *Akbar* in comparative constructions may reflect a functional differentiation. One articulates inherent majesty; the other underscores surpassing greatness in relational contexts.

Theologically, this distinction resonates with the principles of *Tawḥīd* and *Tanzīh*. Absolute attributes reinforce transcendence without relational dependency. Comparative forms rhetorically negate rivals by asserting superiority. Both serve monotheistic discourse but operate at different semantic levels.

Thus, from a purely linguistic standpoint, the Qur'an distinguishes between an established divine attribute (*al-Kabīr*) and comparative expressions (*Akbar*). The absence of “*al-Akbar*” as a nominal divine name suggests that the Qur'an maintains morphological boundaries in self-description.

This analysis does not negate the devotional legitimacy of phrases employing *Akbar*, nor does it diminish their theological resonance. Rather, it clarifies that, within the Qur'anic corpus, the linguistic status of *Kabīr* differs from that of *Akbar*. The former functions as an absolute attribute embedded within divine self-description; the latter functions primarily as a comparative or rhetorical intensifier.

In summary, the K-B-R root demonstrates morphological and semantic differentiation in the Qur'an. *Al-Kabīr* appears as an established qualitative attribute of God, conveying inherent greatness. *Akbar* appears in elative constructions expressing surpassing greatness. Recognising this distinction enhances precision in understanding how the Qur'an articulates divine greatness within its linguistic system.

## 6. Divine Self-Description in the Qur'an

Divine self-description constitutes one of the most theologically significant and linguistically structured dimensions of the Qur'anic discourse. The Qur'an not only proclaims God's existence and sovereignty but also repeatedly articulates who God is through a rich network of names, attributes, predicates, and descriptive clauses. These expressions form a patterned system rather than a random collection of epithets. A Qur'an-centric investigation into divine greatness—particularly the distinction between *Kabīr* and *Akbar*—requires situating the K-B-R root within the broader architecture of divine self-description.

This section examines patterns of divine naming in the Qur'an and frequency and distribution trends, with particular attention to morphological consistency and rhetorical function.

### 6.1 Patterns of Divine Naming

#### 6.1.1. The Formulaic Structure of Divine Self-Attribution

A prominent feature of Qur'anic discourse is the recurring formula:

*Inna Allāha huwa...* (“Indeed, God—He is...”) *Wa huwa...* (“And He is...”)

These constructions are frequently followed by pairs or clusters of attributes, such as:

- Wa huwa al-'Alī al-'Azīm (Q. 2:255)
- Wa huwa al-'Alī al-Kabīr (Q. 22:62; 31:30; 34:23)
- Wa Allāhu 'Alīmun Ḥakīm (Q. 4:11, among many others)

This syntactic pattern reflects both theological emphasis and linguistic regularity. The pronoun *huwa* reinforces divine uniqueness, while the attributes appear in the definite form, often preceded by *al-* (the). According to classical Arabic grammar, the definite article contributes to specificity and established identity (Wright, 1896/1971).

The Qur'an thus presents divine names as stable nominal predicates rather than ad hoc descriptors. Izutsu (1964) argues that these repeated attribute-pairs generate a semantic system in which divine identity is structured relationally across the text. For example, knowledge (*'ilm*), wisdom (*ḥikmah*), mercy (*rahmah*), power (*qudrah*), and greatness (*kibr*) interlock to form a coherent theological worldview.

Within this patterned structure, *al-Kabīr* appears alongside attributes that denote transcendence and supremacy. The recurrence of fixed adjectival forms in paired constructions indicates deliberate stylistic consistency.

### 6.1.2. The Definite Article and Nominal Stability

One of the most striking patterns in divine self-description is the frequent use of the definite article (*al-*). Names such as *al-Raḥmān*, *al-Raḥīm*, *al-'Alīm*, *al-Qadīr*, and *al-Kabīr* appear in definite form, signalling stable and recognised divine attributes.

The Qur'an also includes indefinite predicate adjectives (e.g., *Allāhu 'Alīmun Ḥakīm*), yet these still function as established qualitative descriptors. The consistency of morphological patterns suggests that the Qur'an favours certain adjectival forms when articulating inherent divine qualities.

Notably, the Qur'an does not present "al-Akbar" as a divine name in this structured pattern. While relative forms occur elsewhere in comparative statements, the absence of the definite relative in divine self-attribution stands in contrast to the consistent use of *al-Kabīr*.

Rahman (1980) emphasises that the Qur'an's theological coherence emerges from its internal linguistic patterns. Thus, identifying recurring morphological structures helps clarify how the text constructs divine identity.

### 6.1.3. Pairing and Thematic Clustering

Another defining feature of Qur'anic naming is the pairing of attributes. These pairings often juxtapose complementary dimensions of divine perfection. Examples include:

- 'Alīmun Ḥakīm (All-Knowing, All-Wise)
- Ghafūrun Raḥīm (Forgiving, Merciful)
- 'Azīzun Ḥakīm (Mighty, Wise)

Such pairings reinforce balance and theological harmony. According to Abdel Haleem (2004), these combinations serve rhetorical and pedagogical purposes, reminding the audience that divine justice is tempered with mercy and power with wisdom.

When *al-Kabīr* appears, it is frequently paired with *al-'Alī* (The Most High). The semantic proximity between elevation and greatness underscores transcendence (*tanzīh*). The repetition of this pairing across multiple sūrahs suggests intentional patterning rather than incidental usage.

By contrast, relative forms such as *Akbar* do not appear in these fixed pairings as stable divine names. Instead, they function within dynamic rhetorical contexts, often in evaluative or comparative discourse.

### 6.1.4. Self-Description and Polemic Context

Divine self-description often appears in polemical contexts where the Qur'an challenges polytheistic claims. Assertions such as "God is the Truth" and "He is the Most High, the Most Great" serve to negate rival deities (Neuwirth, 2010).

In these contexts, the stability of nominal attributes reinforces theological clarity. The Qur'an does not present divine identity as fluid or situational; rather, it emphasises permanence. The morphological patterns used for naming reflect this permanence.

Elative forms, however, appear frequently in rhetorical negation of rivals (e.g., God is greater than what they associate). Such usage underscores superiority without necessarily establishing a fixed nominal attribute.

## 6.2. Frequency Analysis

### 6.2.1. Distribution of K-B-R Derivatives

The K-B-R root appears in multiple forms throughout the Qur'an, including:

- *Kabīr* (Great)
- *Akbar* (Greater/Greatest)
- Verbal forms such as *kabbara* (to magnify)
- Nouns related to arrogance (*istikbār*)

A survey of occurrences indicates that *al-Kabīr* appears several times as an explicit divine attribute (e.g., Q. 13:9; 22:62; 31:30; 34:23; 40:12). In each case, it functions as a stable qualitative predicate.

*Akbar*, by contrast, appears in contexts such as:

- *Wa la-dhikru Allāhi akbar* (Q. 29:45)
- *Wa riḍwānun min Allāhi akbar* (Q. 9:72)

In these instances, the elative form emphasises comparative greatness within a given discourse framework. The difference in syntactic function aligns with morphological classification. The frequency of *al-Kabīr* in nominal attribution supports its role as an established divine attribute, while *Akbar* occurs predominantly in comparative clauses.

### 6.2.2. Broader Attribute Frequency Patterns

Beyond the K-B-R root, frequency patterns reveal that certain divine names recur extensively throughout the Qur'an. For example:

- *al-Raḥīm* and *al-Ghaḥūr* appear dozens of times.
- *'Alīm* and *Ḥakīm* frequently appear in paired constructions.

These high-frequency attributes reinforce key theological themes such as mercy, knowledge, and wisdom (Izutsu, 1964). By comparison, *al-Kabīr* appears less frequently but remains consistently structured when used. The limited but stable occurrence suggests focused semantic deployment rather than diffuse usage. Frequency alone does not determine theological centrality; however, recurring morphological stability indicates deliberate textual strategy.

### 6.2.3 Morphological Consistency

A striking observation in frequency analysis is the Qur'an's morphological consistency in divine naming. Intensive adjectival patterns (*fa'īl*, *fa''āl*, *maf'ūl*) dominate divine attributes. Examples include:

- *Raḥīm*
- *'Alīm*
- *Qadīr*
- *Kabīr*

These forms denote inherent, enduring qualities. The Qur'an rarely employs elative forms as fixed divine names. Even when an elative implies ultimate supremacy, it remains grammatically comparative.

Wright (1896/1971) notes that the elative form inherently presupposes comparison, though context may imply absoluteness. The Qur'an's consistent avoidance of the definite elative in divine self-description suggests morphological intentionality.

### 6.3. Theological Implications of Naming Patterns

The patterns observed in divine self-description align with the principles of Tawhīd and Tanzīh. Absolute adjectival forms emphasise inherent perfection without relational dependency. Comparative forms function rhetorically to negate rivals or emphasise superiority.

Rahman (1980) argues that Qur'anic theology prioritises internal coherence. The stability of divine naming patterns contributes to this coherence. The recurrence of specific morphological forms reinforces a structured understanding of divine attributes.

Importantly, recognising these patterns does not negate the devotional legitimacy of comparative expressions such as *Allāhu Akbar*. Rather, it clarifies their grammatical function within the Qur'anic corpus. The phrase expresses surpassing greatness, yet the Qur'an's established nominal attribute for divine greatness remains *al-Kabīr*.

### 6.4. Synthesis

The Qur'an presents divine self-description through structured, recurring morphological patterns. These patterns include:

- Definite nominal attributes with *al-*
- Paired constructions reinforcing theological balance
- Stable adjectival forms denoting inherent qualities
- Comparative forms used rhetorically rather than nominally

Within this architecture, *al-Kabīr* functions as a recognised qualitative attribute, while *Akbar* operates primarily in comparative or evaluative discourse. Frequency and distribution trends reinforce this distinction.

Thus, the Qur'anic presentation of divine greatness reflects morphological precision and theological coherence. Understanding this structured pattern provides essential context for evaluating how devotional expressions relate to scriptural naming conventions.

## 7. Discussion: Kabīr vs. Akbar in Devotional Usage

The preceding linguistic and textual analyses demonstrate that the Qur'an employs the K-B-R root in differentiated morphological patterns, particularly distinguishing between *al-Kabīr* as a nominal attribute and *Akbar* as an elative, comparative form. This section moves from textual description to interpretive discussion by examining how these two forms function within devotional usage and how that usage relates to Qur'anic linguistic structure. The purpose here is not to adjudicate devotional legitimacy but to evaluate morpho-semantic alignment between Qur'anic self-description and later ritual practice.

### 7.1. Devotional Centrality of Allāhu Akbar

There is no question that *Allāhu Akbar* occupies a central position in Islamic ritual life. It opens the canonical prayer (*takbīrat al-ihrām*), punctuates each unit of prayer, and forms part of the *adhān*. It is recited in moments of gratitude, triumph, fear, and remembrance. Historically, the phrase became embedded in communal identity and spiritual consciousness (Donner, 2010).

From a devotional standpoint, the phrase expresses transcendence, sovereignty, and incomparability. It functions as a declaration that God surpasses all perceived powers, values, or attachments. In this sense, the devotional force of *Akbar* aligns with the Qur'anic principle of Tawhīd: God is greater than any rival or object of association.

However, devotional centrality does not automatically determine morphological status. Linguistically, *Akbar* remains an elative form. As Wright (1896/1971) explains, the *af'al* pattern

inherently conveys comparison or superlativeness. In many contexts, the comparison may be implicit (“greater than all”), yet the grammatical structure remains relational.

Thus, the devotional repetition of *Allāhu Akbar* does not transform the word into a nominal adjective equivalent in structure to *al-Kabīr*. Rather, it perpetuates a comparative declaration whose theological depth lies precisely in its relational negation of rivals.

### 7.2. The Morphological Distinction in Theological Terms

The Qur’an’s use of *al-Kabīr* presents divine greatness as an inherent, absolute quality. When the text declares “He is al-‘Alī al-Kabīr” (Q. 22:62), it establishes greatness as a stable attribute within a pattern of nominal predicates. This structure mirrors other intensive forms used in divine naming, such as *‘Alīm* and *Ḥakīm*.

By contrast, *Akbar* appears in statements such as “the remembrance of God is greater” (Q. 29:45) or “the pleasure of God is greater” (Q. 9:72). In these cases, the relative emphasises superiority within a comparative framework. The Qur’an does not present “al-Akbar” in the same patterned self-descriptive formula as *al-Kabīr*.

This distinction has theological implications. Absolute attributes (*ṣifāt dhātiyyah*) describe inherent divine perfection, while comparative declarations function rhetorically to negate equivalence or assert supremacy. Izutsu (1964) emphasises that Qur’anic semantics operate relationally within a structured worldview. The relational force of *Akbar* aligns with polemical negation—God is greater than idols, worldly attachments, or limited conceptions of power.

In devotional practice, however, repeated usage may blur morphological distinctions. Through constant repetition, the phrase *Allāhu Akbar* acquires a quasi-nominal resonance. Yet from a strictly linguistic perspective, it remains structurally comparative.

### 7.3. Ritualisation and Semantic Intensification

The evolution of devotional language illustrates how scriptural phrases can acquire intensified symbolic meaning. As Hallaq (2009) notes, Islamic ritual developed through the dynamic interplay between revelation and prophetic practice. Once incorporated into formal prayer, the *takbīr* gained normative authority.

Ritualisation often produces semantic intensification. Repetition transforms a comparative statement into an existential affirmation. In lived experience, believers do not parse the grammatical structure of *Akbar*; they experience it as a declaration of ultimate greatness.

This phenomenon is not unique to Islam. Religious traditions frequently elevate scriptural phrases into identity markers whose devotional meaning surpasses their grammatical origins. Yet for linguistic analysis, it remains necessary to distinguish between experiential resonance and morphological classification.

The Qur’an’s patterned self-description favours stable adjectival forms for divine names. While *Akbar* powerfully conveys transcendence, its grammatical identity differs from that of *al-Kabīr*. Recognising this distinction clarifies how the Qur’an articulates greatness at different semantic levels.

### 7.4. The Role of Implicit Comparison

One possible argument is that *Akbar*, in devotional usage, implies absolute superlativeness rather than simple comparison. In Arabic rhetoric, the relative can function as a superlative even without explicit comparative particles (Wright, 1896/1971). Thus, *Allāhu Akbar* may be understood as “God is the Greatest.”

However, even superlative usage remains grammatically tied to comparison, whether explicit or implicit. The relative presupposes a relational horizon—greater than all else. The theological power of the phrase lies precisely in this negation of all competing greatness.

By contrast, *al-Kabīr* does not depend on comparison. It affirms inherent greatness without reference to a rival. This difference parallels the distinction between intrinsic and relational predicates

in philosophical theology. Intrinsic attributes describe what God is; relational declarations describe how God stands in relation to creation.

In Qur'anic discourse, both functions are present. The text affirms intrinsic attributes through stable adjectival forms and employs relational relatives to negate rivals. The devotional elevation of *Akbar* highlights relational transcendence, while the Qur'anic naming pattern emphasises intrinsic greatness through *al-Kabīr*. Even where the relative appears to function as a superlative without an explicit comparator, classical Arabic grammar maintains that the form remains morphologically comparative in origin and semantic structure (Wright, 1896; Ibn Hishām, 2000).

#### 7.5. Semantic Coherence Within Tawhīd

Within the framework of Tawhīd, both *Kabīr* and *Akbar* reinforce divine uniqueness. The former asserts inherent greatness; the latter denies equivalence. Together, they articulate two complementary dimensions of monotheistic theology.

Rahman (1980) argues that Qur'anic theology balances affirmation and negation. Affirmative attributes describe divine perfection, while negation denies likeness or limitation. The relative form participates in this negational strategy by asserting that God surpasses all comparatives.

Therefore, the devotional predominance of *Allāhu Akbar* may be understood as emphasising the negational aspect of Tawhīd. It declares that whatever humans might consider great—wealth, power, fear, authority—God is greater still.

However, from a Qur'an-centric naming perspective, the intrinsic attribute corresponding to greatness remains *al-Kabīr*. The Qur'an consistently uses this form within nominal self-description. The absence of “*al-Akbar*” suggests that the text maintains a morphological distinction between intrinsic naming and relational emphasis.

#### 7.6. Implications for Qur'an-Centric Theology

The discussion yields several implications for Qur'an-centric theological reflection.

First, it underscores the importance of linguistic precision in understanding divine attributes. Morphological patterns are not arbitrary; they structure meaning within the text.

Second, it illustrates how devotional practice can amplify one dimension of scriptural language without necessarily replicating its exact naming pattern. The ritual centrality of *Allāhu Akbar* does not negate the Qur'anic status of *al-Kabīr* as the explicit nominal attribute of greatness.

Third, it highlights the complementary nature of intrinsic and relational expressions of divine transcendence. The Qur'an employs both forms, though in distinct grammatical contexts.

Finally, this analysis encourages careful differentiation between textual description and devotional evolution. Recognising that *Akbar* functions grammatically as an relative does not diminish its spiritual potency. Rather, it clarifies how the Qur'an linguistically articulates greatness and how ritual practice extends that articulation into lived experience.

The distinction between *Kabīr* and *Akbar* in devotional usage reflects the broader dynamic between scriptural language and ritual development. The Qur'an presents *al-Kabīr* as an established qualitative attribute of God, embedded within structured patterns of self-description. *Akbar*, while present in the Qur'an, functions primarily as a comparative or superlative declaration within specific rhetorical contexts.

In devotional life, the repeated invocation of *Allāhu Akbar* expresses profound theological truth: God surpasses all conceivable greatness. Yet from a linguistic standpoint, the phrase remains morphologically distinct from the nominal attribute *al-Kabīr*.

Recognising this distinction enriches rather than diminishes theological understanding. It reveals the layered nature of Qur'anic discourse—where intrinsic attributes affirm divine essence and comparative declarations negate rivals. Together, these forms contribute to a coherent articulation of divine greatness within the Qur'anic worldview.

## 8. Conclusion

This study has undertaken a Qur'an-centred linguistic and theological investigation of the K-B-R root in order to reassess how divine greatness is articulated within the Holy Qur'an. By grounding the analysis in the foundational principles of Tawhīd and Tanzīh, and by prioritising the Qur'an's own patterns of self-description, the research has demonstrated a clear morphological and semantic distinction between *al-Kabīr* and *Akbar*.

The findings confirm that *al-Kabīr* appears in the Qur'an as an intrinsic and established divine attribute, embedded within structured naming formulas that consistently describe Allah in absolute, non-relational terms. As an intensive adjectival form, *al-Kabīr* conveys inherent greatness—an essential quality that does not depend on comparison, contrast, or relational framing. Its placement alongside other divine attributes reflects a coherent theological grammar aligned with the Qur'anic doctrine of divine uniqueness and incomparability.

In contrast, *Akbar* functions grammatically as an elative form. In Arabic morphology, the elative inherently expresses comparison or superlative ranking. Even when used rhetorically to negate rivals, it retains a relational logic: something is described as "greater" in relation to something else. The Qur'an does not present *Akbar* as a divine name, nor does it employ the form as a direct self-referential attribute of Allah. Given the Qur'anic insistence that "There is nothing like unto Him" (Qur'an 42:11), any formulation implying comparative hierarchy risks introducing relational contrast into a domain the Qur'an treats as absolutely incomparable.

From a strictly Qur'an-centric theological standpoint, therefore, describing Allah through a comparative structure raises doctrinal concerns. Divine greatness in the Qur'an is articulated as absolute and intrinsic, not as relational superiority within a spectrum of beings. While devotional expressions such as "Allāhu Akbar" have become deeply embedded within Islamic ritual practice, their linguistic structure differs from the Qur'an's own established naming patterns.

This conclusion distinguishes between devotional practice and Qur'anic linguistic authority, focusing exclusively on the latter as the primary theological criterion for divine self-description. If the Qur'an serves as the ultimate theological criterion, then divine names and attributes must be derived from its explicit formulations. The consistent Qur'anic use of *al-Kabīr*—rather than *Akbar*—suggests that intrinsic, non-comparative language best reflects the Qur'an's theological grammar of transcendence.

Ultimately, this study argues that fidelity to the Qur'an's linguistic precision strengthens rather than weakens theological clarity. By distinguishing between intrinsic attributes and comparative constructions, it reaffirms the central Qur'anic principle that Allah's greatness is absolute, incomparable, and beyond all relational measurement.

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