



Hadith Interpretation from a Contemporary Perspective: Foundations, Techniques, and Its Relevance to the Dynamics of Modern Society.

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Abstrak

Hadits merupakan sumber ajaran Islam kedua setelah Al-Qur'an yang berfungsi menjelaskan, memperinci, dan memberikan contoh konkret terhadap nilai-nilai Islam. Perbedaan konteks waktu, sosial, budaya, dan perkembangan peradaban antara masa Nabi Muhammad saw. dan kehidupan modern menuntut proses interpretasi yang metodologis agar hadits dipahami secara tepat. Artikel ini bertujuan menjelaskan landasan ilmiah, teknik interpretasi, serta relevansi pemahaman hadits dalam merespons dinamika masyarakat kontemporer. Penelitian menggunakan metode studi kepustakaan dengan menelaah literatur ilmu hadits, ushul fikih, syarah klasik, dan kajian kontemporer. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa interpretasi hadits harus diawali dengan verifikasi sanad dan matan, penguasaan bahasa Arab, pemahaman asbab al-wurud dan konteks sosial-historis, integrasi dengan Al-Qur'an dan hadits setema, serta orientasi pada maqashid al-syari'ah. Teknik yang dapat digunakan meliputi pendekatan tekstual, kontekstual, historis, linguistik, tematik, komparatif, dan hermeneutik secara terbatas dan terkendali. Penerapan pendekatan tersebut menjadikan hadits tetap otentik sekaligus relevan bagi persoalan ekonomi digital, kecerdasan buatan, bioetika, hak asasi manusia, lingkungan, dan kehidupan masyarakat majemuk. Interpretasi yang komprehensif juga mencegah pemahaman parsial, kaku, dan ekstrem terhadap teks keagamaan.

Kata kunci: interpretasi hadits, fiqh al-hadith, syarah hadits, maqashid al-syari'ah, masyarakat modern.

Abstract

Hadith is the second primary source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an and serves to explain, elaborate, and provide concrete examples of Islamic values. Differences in temporal, social, cultural, and civilizational contexts between the Prophet Muhammad's era and modern life require a methodological process of interpretation so that hadith can be understood accurately. This article examines the scientific foundations, interpretive techniques, and relevance of hadith interpretation in responding to contemporary social dynamics. The study employs library research by reviewing works on hadith sciences, usul al-fiqh, classical commentaries, and contemporary scholarship. The findings indicate that hadith interpretation must begin with verification of the chain of transmission and text, mastery of Arabic, understanding of asbab al-wurud and socio-historical context, integration with the Qur'an and related hadiths, and orientation toward maqasid al-shari'ah. Interpretive techniques include textual, contextual, historical, linguistic, thematic, comparative, and carefully controlled hermeneutical approaches. These approaches preserve the authenticity of hadith while enabling its relevance to digital economy, artificial intelligence, bioethics, human rights, environmental issues, and plural societies. A comprehensive interpretation also prevents partial, rigid, and extreme readings of religious texts.

Keywords: hadith interpretation, fiqh al-hadith, hadith commentary, maqasid al-shari'ah, modern society.

Introduction

Hadith occupies a fundamental position in Islamic scholarship as the second primary source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an. It functions to explain, clarify, and provide practical examples of the principles contained in the Qur'an. Through hadith, Muslims obtain more detailed guidance regarding worship, social relations, morality, economic activities, leadership, and various other dimensions of life. Therefore, a proper understanding of hadith is essential because it influences the way Islamic teachings are interpreted and implemented in Muslim societies. However, understanding hadith is not always a simple process. The sayings, actions, approvals, and characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad were transmitted within particular linguistic, historical, social, and cultural contexts. The Prophet lived in seventh-century Arabian society, which possessed customs, political structures, economic practices, and social relations that differ significantly from those of contemporary society. Consequently, some hadith cannot be understood accurately through a purely literal reading because their meanings may be closely connected to specific circumstances surrounding their emergence.

The considerable temporal distance between the period of the Prophet and the present era creates additional challenges for hadith interpretation. Changes in language, social institutions, cultural values, scientific knowledge, and patterns of human interaction may affect the way a hadith is understood. Certain expressions used in hadith may contain figurative, symbolic, contextual, or culturally specific meanings. Without an adequate interpretive framework, readers may misunderstand the intended message and apply a particular hadith in a manner that is inconsistent with its original purpose.

Contemporary society is also characterized by rapid developments in science, technology, economics,

politics, and global communication. New issues such as artificial intelligence, digital transactions, biotechnology, environmental crises, gender equality, human rights, religious pluralism, and global citizenship were not explicitly discussed in the social forms known during the Prophet's lifetime. These developments require Muslim scholars to examine how the ethical and legal principles contained in hadith can be applied to modern realities. Hadith interpretation therefore becomes an important intellectual bridge between classical religious texts and contemporary social problems.

An appropriate interpretation of hadith requires more than translating its words from Arabic into another language. Interpretation involves examining the authenticity of the chain of transmission and the text, analysing linguistic structures, identifying the circumstances of revelation or occurrence, and relating the hadith to the Qur'an and other relevant traditions. It also requires attention to the objectives of Islamic law, commonly known as *maqasid al-shari'ah*, so that the interpretation reflects justice, public benefit, human dignity, and the protection of essential human interests.

Various interpretive techniques have been developed within both classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship. These include textual, contextual, historical, linguistic, thematic, comparative, and hermeneutical approaches. Each technique offers a particular analytical perspective and may be applied according to the nature of the hadith being examined. A textual approach may be suitable for traditions containing clear normative instructions, while contextual and historical approaches are necessary when a hadith is associated with a specific social or political condition.

The significance of hadith interpretation is particularly evident in preventing narrow, rigid,

and extremist religious understandings. Partial readings that isolate a hadith from its historical background, related traditions, and broader Islamic principles may produce conclusions that contradict the universal values of mercy, justice, moderation, and peace. In the digital era, this problem becomes more serious because fragments of hadith are frequently circulated through social media without sufficient explanation concerning their authenticity, context, or scholarly interpretation.

Based on these considerations, the study of hadith interpretation from a contemporary perspective is both academically and socially important. This article discusses the conceptual foundations of hadith interpretation, the principal scientific bases that guide the interpretive process, and the various techniques used to understand hadith comprehensively. It also examines the relevance of hadith interpretation to the dynamics of modern society, particularly in maintaining the authenticity of Islamic teachings while ensuring that their universal messages remain applicable, contextual, and responsive to the needs of humanity.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research as its primary research design. The method was selected because the study focused on examining concepts, foundations, techniques, and contemporary relevance of hadith interpretation through written scholarly sources. Rather than collecting numerical data or conducting field observations, the research analysed ideas, arguments, and methodological perspectives developed within classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship.

The data used in this study were obtained from primary and secondary literature related to hadith studies, *usul al-fiqh*, *maqasid al-shari'ah*, Islamic legal theory, and contemporary approaches to religious texts. Primary sources included authoritative hadith collections, classical commentaries, and works written by recognised

Muslim scholars. Secondary sources consisted of academic books, journal articles, research reports, and scholarly publications discussing textual, contextual, historical, linguistic, thematic, comparative, and hermeneutical approaches to hadith interpretation.

The selection of literature was conducted purposively based on its relevance to the research objectives. Sources were chosen when they directly discussed the definition of hadith interpretation, its epistemological foundations, interpretive principles, methodological techniques, or its application to contemporary issues. Priority was given to scholarly works that presented clear theoretical arguments, systematic analysis, and academic references. Literature that lacked relevance, methodological clarity, or sufficient scholarly credibility was excluded from the analysis.

Data collection was carried out through documentation and systematic literature review. The researchers identified relevant publications, read the selected materials carefully, recorded important concepts, and classified the information according to the main themes of the study. The collected data were organised into several categories, including the meaning of hadith interpretation, the foundations of interpretation, interpretive techniques, and the relevance of hadith interpretation to the dynamics of modern society.

The study applied content analysis to examine the selected literature. This technique was used to identify recurring concepts, interpretive patterns, similarities, differences, and relationships among various scholarly perspectives. Each source was analysed not only according to its explicit statements but also according to the assumptions, objectives, and intellectual framework underlying its arguments.

Through this process, the study sought to construct a comprehensive understanding of hadith interpretation.

A comparative analysis was also employed to examine classical and contemporary approaches. Classical methods, particularly sharh al-hadith and fiqh al-hadith, were compared with contextual, interdisciplinary, and hermeneutical approaches developed in modern scholarship. The comparison focused on their analytical orientation, treatment of textual meaning, attention to historical context, and capacity to address contemporary social issues. This procedure enabled the study to identify both continuity and methodological development within the tradition of hadith interpretation.

To ensure the validity of the analysis, the study used source triangulation by comparing information from different books, journal articles, and scholarly perspectives. Arguments found in one source were examined alongside other relevant references to avoid dependence on a single interpretation. The Qur'an, related hadith traditions, classical commentaries, and contemporary academic studies were also considered together in order to maintain conceptual balance and interpretive accuracy.

The final stage involved synthesising the findings into a coherent analytical description. The results were interpreted by considering the authenticity of hadith, linguistic meaning, historical and social context, intertextual relationships, and the objectives of Islamic law. This synthesis was then used to explain how responsible hadith interpretation can preserve the originality of Islamic teachings while responding appropriately to scientific, technological, economic, cultural, and social developments in contemporary society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that hadith interpretation is a structured scholarly process that extends beyond the literal translation of prophetic traditions. It involves efforts to explain,

analyse, and uncover legal, moral, theological, and social meanings contained in the sayings, actions, approvals, and characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad. In the classical Islamic intellectual tradition, this process is commonly associated with sharh al-hadith and fiqh al-hadith, both of which aim to reveal the intended meaning of hadith and its practical implications.

The study also found that hadith interpretation is closely related to the distinction between riwayat and dirayah. Riwayat concerns the transmission, documentation, and authentication of hadith, while dirayah focuses on understanding and analysing its meaning. A hadith that has been authenticated through the study of its chain of transmission still requires interpretation before it can be applied to social and legal realities. Therefore, interpretation represents an essential stage that connects the authenticity of hadith with its practical relevance.

Another important finding is that the validity of the chain of transmission and the text forms the first foundation of hadith interpretation. A hadith must be examined through sanad and matn criticism before its meaning is used as the basis for legal, ethical, or theological conclusions. Authentic and acceptable hadith, particularly those classified as sahih or hasan, provide a stronger basis for interpretation, whereas fabricated or severely weak traditions cannot be treated as authoritative evidence.

The findings further show that mastery of the Arabic language is indispensable in interpreting hadith. The analysis of grammar, morphology, rhetoric, semantics, metaphor, and historical usage helps prevent errors in understanding prophetic expressions. Words found in hadith may carry literal, religious, customary, or figurative meanings. As a result, interpreters must identify the meaning

most consistent with the linguistic context and the usage of Arabic during the Prophet's era.

The study identified historical and social context as another major foundation of hadith interpretation. Many hadith emerged as responses to particular events, questions, conflicts, or social practices in seventh-century Arabian society. Understanding *asbab al-wurud* and the historical circumstances surrounding a hadith enables scholars to distinguish between universal principles and temporary or local instructions. This distinction is essential to avoid applying situational rulings as permanent and universal commands.

The results also demonstrate that hadith must be interpreted in relation to the Qur'an and other relevant hadith. A single hadith should not be isolated from the broader framework of Islamic teachings. General traditions may be clarified by more specific ones, while absolute statements may be limited by other texts. This integrative approach reduces apparent contradictions and produces a more comprehensive understanding of the Prophet's teachings.

Several major interpretive techniques were identified in the reviewed literature, namely textual, contextual, historical, linguistic, thematic, comparative, and hermeneutical approaches. The textual approach emphasises the explicit meaning of the wording, while contextual and historical approaches examine the circumstances in which the hadith emerged. The thematic approach collects all traditions related to a specific topic, whereas the comparative approach examines differences among narrations, scholars, and schools of thought.

Finally, the study found that contemporary hadith interpretation plays a significant role in addressing modern social dynamics. Issues related to digital economics, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, gender, human rights, environmental protection, religious pluralism, and global communication require interpretations that consider both the authenticity

of the text and the objectives of Islamic law. Proper interpretation enables hadith to remain relevant while preventing rigid, fragmented, and extremist understandings.

DISCUSSION

The findings affirm that hadith interpretation should be understood as an intellectual activity that combines respect for religious authority with critical scholarly analysis. It cannot be reduced to literal reading because language always operates within particular historical and social conditions. At the same time, interpretation cannot be conducted freely without methodological limitations. A balanced approach is therefore required to preserve the integrity of prophetic teachings while allowing their meanings to respond to changing realities.

The distinction between *riwayah* and *dirayah* highlights the relationship between authenticity and understanding. Verification of the chain of transmission ensures that a hadith can reasonably be attributed to the Prophet, while interpretive analysis determines what the hadith means and how it should be applied. These two dimensions are mutually dependent. Authenticity without interpretation may produce texts that are preserved but not properly understood, whereas interpretation without authenticity may result in conclusions based on unreliable traditions.

The importance of Arabic linguistic competence demonstrates that translation alone is insufficient for hadith studies. A translated expression may fail to convey rhetorical devices, semantic variations, legal implications, and culturally embedded meanings. Therefore, interpreters must engage with the original Arabic wording and examine how specific terms were used in early Islamic society. This linguistic analysis also helps distinguish between ordinary

lexical meanings and technical meanings developed within Islamic law and ritual practice. Historical and contextual analysis is particularly necessary when dealing with hadith related to politics, warfare, leadership, gender relations, and social customs. Some prophetic instructions were directed toward specific individuals or communities under particular circumstances. Applying such statements without examining their background may lead to conclusions that conflict with justice, public welfare, or the broader objectives of Islam. Contextual interpretation does not eliminate the authority of the text, but clarifies the scope and purpose of its application.

The integration of hadith with the Qur'an and other traditions reflects the internal coherence of Islamic sources. Since hadith explains and elaborates Qur'anic teachings, its interpretation should support rather than contradict fundamental Qur'anic principles such as justice, mercy, human dignity, and protection of life. Apparent contradictions can often be resolved by examining differences in context, audience, chronology, wording, and legal scope. This method reduces selective citation and encourages a holistic reading of Islamic teachings.

The variety of interpretive techniques shows that no single method is adequate for every hadith. Literal interpretation may be appropriate for clear ritual instructions, while contextual or historical analysis may be more suitable for socially specific traditions. The thematic method is useful for complex issues because it gathers multiple narrations and prevents conclusions based on isolated texts. Comparative analysis also broadens understanding by exposing interpreters to different scholarly positions and legal traditions.

The use of maqasid al-shari'ah strengthens the relevance of hadith interpretation in modern society. The objectives of Islamic law, including the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, provide an ethical framework for

evaluating the application of prophetic teachings. Contemporary scholars may use these objectives to address new issues that were not explicitly discussed in early Islamic society. This approach ensures that interpretation remains connected to both the text and the welfare of humanity.

Overall, contemporary hadith interpretation should integrate classical scholarship with interdisciplinary perspectives. Classical commentaries preserve linguistic, legal, and theological insights developed through long scholarly traditions, while modern disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history, and hermeneutics offer additional tools for understanding context. The integration of these approaches can produce interpretations that are academically responsible, religiously grounded, moderate, and responsive to the challenges of contemporary life.

CONCLUSION

Hadith interpretation is a systematic scholarly process that seeks to understand the meaning, purpose, and relevance of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings. It does not merely rely on literal translation, but also considers the authenticity of the sanad and matn, Arabic linguistic structures, historical circumstances, social context, related Qur'anic verses and hadith, as well as the objectives of Islamic law. Through these foundations, hadith can be understood more accurately and responsibly.

The study shows that textual, contextual, historical, linguistic, thematic, comparative, and hermeneutical approaches have complementary functions in interpreting hadith. No single method can be applied equally to all prophetic traditions because each hadith has different linguistic, legal, and historical characteristics. Therefore, a comprehensive interpretation requires the

integration of classical hadith scholarship with relevant contemporary disciplines.

In modern society, proper hadith interpretation is essential for responding to developments in science, technology, digital economics, human rights, environmental issues, and social change. A balanced interpretive approach helps preserve the authenticity of Islamic teachings while ensuring that their universal values remain relevant to contemporary life. It also prevents narrow, rigid, and extremist understandings by promoting interpretations grounded in justice, mercy, moderation, and human welfare.

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