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Beyond Textual Comparison: Developing an Intertextual Framework for Hadith Matn Criticism

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Abstract

Hadith matn criticism has long drawn upon comparison of reports, scrutiny of linguistic anomalies, and reconciliation of apparently conflicting narrations. Yet the relationships among textual variants, Qur'anic discourse, and historically situated interpretation are not always described within a single analytical procedure. This conceptual study develops a three-dimensional intertextual framework through critical engagement with classical hadith-critical concerns, historical scholarship on transmission, and contemporary theories of textual relationships. Its proposed dimensions are intra-hadith intertextuality, Qur'an–hadith intertextuality, and historical-discursive intertextuality. The analysis differentiates observable textual correspondences, interpretive inferences, and historical claims requiring independent corroboration. It further proposes an eight-stage workflow for defining a corpus, comparing variants, mapping scriptural and contextual relationships, assessing alternatives, and checking the limits of authentication claims. The resulting framework treats intertextuality as a complement to isnād and matn criticism rather than an autonomous test of prophetic attribution. Its contribution is a transparent conceptual architecture for analyzing textual relationships without conflating semantic coherence with historical authenticity. Because no systematic corpus-based validation is reported, the framework remains a methodological proposal requiring comparative application and further refinement.

Keywords: *hadith matn criticism; intertextuality; textual variants; isnād–matn analysis; Qur'an–hadith relations; historical contextualization.*

INTRODUCTION

The authenticity, transmission, and interpretation of prophetic traditions remain central concerns in contemporary hadith scholarship, particularly because the authority of hadith rests upon the relationship between historical attribution, textual preservation, and normative meaning (Lucas, 2004). Within the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, the evaluation of prophetic reports developed through sophisticated procedures for examining chains of transmission (isnād) and transmitted content (matn). Although these two dimensions are analytically distinguishable, their relationship has never been entirely reducible to a separation between external verification and internal textual evaluation. Brown (2009) demonstrates that the historical development of hadith criticism involved complex negotiations over authenticity, authority, and the reliability of transmitted knowledge. Similarly, Motzki (2005) emphasizes that the historical investigation of Muslim traditions requires careful attention to the methodological assumptions underlying the reconstruction of transmission histories. These considerations suggest that hadith criticism should be understood not merely as the

verification of isolated reports but also as an investigation of the textual and historical relationships through which prophetic traditions were transmitted, preserved, and interpreted.

One of the most persistent methodological debates in hadith studies concerns the extent to which early Muslim scholars systematically examined the content of transmitted reports (Juynboll, 1983). Earlier representations of classical hadith criticism frequently emphasized the predominance of isnād evaluation, thereby creating the impression that the textual substance of a report received comparatively limited critical attention. Brown (2008), however, challenges this characterization by demonstrating that early Sunni hadith critics engaged in substantive matn criticism, even when their evaluative judgments were expressed through the technical vocabulary of transmitter criticism. His findings complicate the conventional distinction between formal transmission criticism and substantive textual assessment. Rather than treating matn criticism as an exclusively modern corrective to classical methods, this scholarship establishes the importance of investigating how textual evaluation operated within historically specific scholarly practices. Nevertheless, identifying the existence of early matn criticism does not, by itself, provide a comprehensive analytical framework for examining the multiple relationships among variant reports, scriptural discourse, and their changing interpretive environments.

The methodological complexity of hadith criticism becomes particularly apparent when a prophetic report survives through multiple transmission pathways and exhibits variations in wording, narrative sequence, contextual explanation, or semantic emphasis (Schoeler, 2006). Such variations cannot always be adequately understood through the binary classification of agreement and contradiction, since differences between transmitted texts may reflect distinct processes of narration, abbreviation, elaboration, interpretation, or transmission. Motzki (2005) argues for methodological approaches capable of evaluating the historical development of traditions through the critical examination of available transmission evidence. The subsequent debate involving Görke et al. (2012) further illustrates the importance of correlating textual and transmission evidence when reconstructing early Islamic reports. These contributions demonstrate that textual variation may provide historically significant information rather than functioning exclusively as evidence of corruption or inconsistency. Consequently, a methodological approach to matn criticism must account for the relationships among textual variants while avoiding the assumption that every detectable difference necessarily represents a distinct historical stage or an alteration of an original prophetic statement.

The theoretical concept of intertextuality offers a productive perspective for reconsidering these methodological challenges (Goldziher, 1971). Originating in the intersection of structural linguistics, dialogism, and literary theory, intertextuality challenges the assumption that texts constitute autonomous and self-contained units of meaning. Kristeva (1980) conceptualizes textual production through the interaction and transformation of preceding discourses, thereby emphasizing that meaning emerges within networks of textual relationships rather than through isolated linguistic structures. Subsequent theoretical developments have expanded this perspective by distinguishing different forms of textual dependence, transformation, and interpretation. Genette (1997), for example, provides a systematic account of relationships among texts, while Allen (2022) demonstrates the continuing relevance of intertextuality for understanding textual production and interpretation across different intellectual and cultural contexts. Although these theories emerged

primarily from literary scholarship, their analytical significance extends to religious texts whose transmission and interpretation involve complex relationships among authoritative narratives, inherited formulations, and changing discursive environments.

Applying intertextuality to hadith studies, however, requires careful methodological differentiation (Berg, 2000). The literary-theoretical proposition that texts acquire meaning through their relationships with other texts cannot be transferred uncritically into a scholarly tradition concerned with the historical attribution of particular statements to the Prophet Muhammad. Whereas intertextual analysis may identify semantic correspondences, narrative parallels, or discursive transformations, such relationships do not independently establish the authenticity, chronology, or direction of transmission. Genette's (1997) classification of textual relationships provides useful analytical distinctions, but its categories must be reconsidered when applied to reports transmitted through identifiable chains of narrators. Similarly, Kristeva's (1980) conception of textual productivity raises important questions about interpretive relationships without necessarily providing procedures for historical authentication. The challenge, therefore, is not simply to introduce intertextual terminology into hadith criticism but to formulate a framework that preserves the epistemological distinction between textual interconnectedness and historically demonstrable transmission.

This distinction becomes especially important when considering the relationship between classical hadith criticism and contemporary approaches to historical reconstruction (Hallaq, 1997). Research employing the combined analysis of transmission chains and textual variants has demonstrated the value of examining correlations between narrators, report structures, and differences in wording. Motzki (2005) discusses the methodological possibilities and limitations of dating Muslim traditions, while Görke et al. (2012) defend the possibility of reconstructing elements of early Islamic transmission through critically evaluated evidence. These studies provide important methodological precedents for relational analysis because they refuse to treat transmitted reports as entirely disconnected textual units. Nevertheless, their principal concern is historical reconstruction rather than the systematic theorization of intertextual relationships across multiple levels of meaning. An intertextual approach to matn criticism can therefore be developed in dialogue with these historical methods, provided that interpretive connections are not confused with evidence of chronological dependence or common transmission origins.

A further methodological consideration concerns the relationship between prophetic traditions and the Qur'an as interconnected yet epistemologically distinct sources of Islamic religious discourse (Neuwirth, 2019). Hadith reports frequently employ concepts, expressions, ethical principles, and narrative structures that resonate with Qur'anic language, making their interpretation inseparable from broader scriptural contexts. Brown (2009) illustrates the complexity of hadith authority and its relationship to Islamic normative reasoning, while Allen's (2022) discussion of intertextuality provides a theoretical basis for examining how meanings are constructed through relationships among texts. From this perspective, Qur'an–hadith intertextuality can be investigated through thematic correspondence, semantic reinforcement, conceptual differentiation, and apparent normative tension. Such analysis, however, must avoid assuming that every similarity demonstrates direct textual borrowing or that apparent differences necessarily indicate incompatibility. Instead, Qur'anic discourse should be incorporated into matn criticism through historically and linguistically

informed procedures that distinguish interpretive coherence from independent evidence of prophetic attribution.

Beyond relationships among transmitted reports and scriptural texts, hadith interpretation also involves historical and discursive contexts that influence the production, circulation, and reception of religious meaning (Sinai, 2017). A report concerning legal practice, communal identity, ethical conduct, or theological controversy may acquire different interpretive significance as it circulates within changing scholarly and social environments. The historical debates examined by Görke et al. (2012) demonstrate the difficulties involved in reconstructing early Islamic traditions from later textual witnesses, particularly when questions of attribution and transmission remain contested. At the theoretical level, Kristeva (1980) and Allen (2022) provide conceptual resources for understanding how textual meanings interact with wider discursive formations. Integrating these perspectives into hadith criticism makes it possible to investigate how historical circumstances and interpretive traditions shape the reception of transmitted reports. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of historical contexts must remain dependent on independently assessable evidence rather than speculative associations between textual content and presumed social circumstances.

Despite these significant developments, an identifiable methodological problem remains at the intersection of classical matn criticism, historical hadith research, and contemporary intertextual theory (Donner, 2010). Brown (2008) establishes the historical presence of content criticism within early Sunni scholarship, whereas Motzki (2005) and Görke et al. (2012) demonstrate the importance of correlating textual and transmission evidence for historical reconstruction. In a different disciplinary context, Kristeva (1980), Genette (1997), and Allen (2022) offer conceptual approaches for understanding relationships among texts and discourses. Yet these contributions pursue different analytical objectives and do not, individually, provide an integrated procedure specifically designed to connect textual variation, Qur'anic correspondence, and historical-discursive relationships within matn criticism. The research gap addressed in this article is therefore not the presumed absence of relational textual analysis in earlier hadith scholarship, but the need for a systematically articulated framework that differentiates types of intertextual relationships, specifies their evidentiary requirements, and establishes the limits of their contribution to hadith authentication and interpretation. This formulation of the gap remains provisional and requires further assessment against scholarship explicitly applying intertextual approaches to hadith.

To address this problem, the present article proposes an intertextual framework organized around three analytically distinct but interconnected dimensions (Brown, 2014). The first, intra-hadith intertextuality, investigates relationships among variant narrations through differences in wording, narrative organization, semantic emphasis, and transmission context. The second, Qur'an–hadith intertextuality, examines thematic, linguistic, and normative relationships between prophetic reports and Qur'anic discourse without presupposing that textual correspondence establishes historical authenticity. The third, historical-discursive intertextuality, situates transmitted reports within relevant social, intellectual, and interpretive contexts while requiring independent historical evidence for claims concerning textual development. These dimensions draw upon the relational insights of intertextual theory (Allen, 2022; Genette, 1997) while remaining attentive to the methodological constraints established in historical hadith research (Brown, 2008; Motzki, 2005). Their integration is intended to move matn criticism beyond the identification of isolated textual

similarities toward a more systematic examination of the relationships through which transmitted meanings can be critically understood.

The proposed framework also requires an explicit distinction among descriptive, interpretive, and historical judgments (Robinson, 2003). At the descriptive level, intertextual analysis identifies observable relationships, including shared expressions, narrative parallels, conceptual correspondences, and differences among transmitted versions. At the interpretive level, it evaluates the possible semantic and normative significance of these relationships within their relevant textual environments. At the historical level, it considers whether available transmission data and contextual evidence support particular explanations of textual development, dependence, or attribution. This differentiation responds to the methodological caution emphasized in historical hadith scholarship, where the presence of textual similarities does not necessarily establish common origins or reliable chronological relationships (Görke et al., 2012; Motzki, 2005). By separating these levels, the framework seeks to prevent interpretive plausibility from being mistaken for historical proof. Its methodological value consequently depends not on replacing established authentication procedures but on clarifying how relational textual evidence may contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of hadith meaning and transmission.

Against this background, the article seeks to develop a theoretically grounded and methodologically operational framework for intertextual matn criticism (Azami, 1977). It addresses three interrelated questions: how can classical approaches to matn criticism be critically reconstructed through contemporary intertextual theory; which analytical procedures can distinguish intra-hadith, Qur'an–hadith, and historical-discursive relationships; and how can these procedures contribute to hadith interpretation without conflating semantic coherence with historical authenticity? Through qualitative library research and conceptual-methodological analysis, the study brings classical critical concerns into dialogue with contemporary scholarship on textual relationships and the historical investigation of transmitted traditions. Its principal contribution lies in proposing an integrated analytical model that differentiates textual comparison from intertextual interpretation while retaining the evidentiary standards necessary for responsible historical inquiry. Rather than presenting intertextuality as a replacement for established hadith criticism, the article advances it as a complementary methodological perspective capable of clarifying the relationships among transmitted texts, scriptural discourse, and historical interpretation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in conceptual-methodological analysis and critical textual inquiry to develop an intertextual framework for hadith matn criticism (Jaakkola, 2020). Rather than treating intertextuality as an independent procedure for determining hadith authenticity, the research examines its potential to complement established methods of textual evaluation and historical investigation. The methodological orientation combines conceptual reconstruction with comparative analysis, allowing classical hadith criticism to be examined alongside contemporary theories of textual relationships. This approach draws upon the understanding of qualitative inquiry as an interpretive process concerned with the relationships among concepts, contexts, and evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018), while incorporating the methodological principles of conceptual analysis and theory development discussed by Jaakkola (2020). The central unit of analysis is the relationship between transmitted texts, including their

linguistic, semantic, narrative, and historically contextualized characteristics, rather than the isolated matn considered independently of its transmission environment.

The study draws on three categories of scholarly materials selected through purposive, relevance-based sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The first comprises classical hadith literature addressing textual variation, conflicting narrations, transmission criticism, and the interpretation of prophetic reports, particularly discussions associated with ʻilal al-ḥadīth, mukhtalif al-ḥadīth, and jamʻ al-riwāyāt. The second consists of contemporary historical-critical scholarship examining the relationship between isnād evidence, matn variation, and the reconstruction of transmission histories, including the methodological contributions of Brown (2008), Motzki (2005), and Görke et al. (2012). The third encompasses theoretical literature on intertextuality and textual relationships, particularly the contributions of Kristeva (1980), Genette (1997), and Allen (2022). Materials are evaluated according to their conceptual relevance, scholarly reliability, and contribution to methodological development. This selection strategy prioritizes analytical depth and theoretical comparability rather than statistical representativeness or an exhaustive bibliometric survey.

Data analysis proceeds through four interconnected stages (Motzki, 2002). The first stage involves identifying and categorizing the analytical principles employed in classical and contemporary hadith criticism, with particular attention to textual comparison, semantic consistency, narrative variation, and the relationship between textual and transmission evidence. The second stage examines major concepts in intertextual theory to determine which can be meaningfully adapted to the epistemological characteristics of hadith transmission. The third stage synthesizes these findings into three analytical dimensions: intra-hadith intertextuality, Qur'an–hadith intertextuality, and historical-discursive intertextuality. Within each dimension, textual relationships are classified according to their observable features, interpretive implications, and evidentiary requirements. The fourth stage develops an operational sequence comprising textual identification, variant comparison, intertextual mapping, contextual evaluation, and interpretive synthesis. Throughout this process, the analysis distinguishes descriptive observations concerning textual similarities from historical claims requiring independent transmission or contextual evidence, thereby maintaining the methodological caution emphasized in historical hadith scholarship (Motzki, 2005).

To assess the analytical applicability of the proposed framework, the study specifies a prospective methodological demonstration using selected hadith reports that exhibit identifiable textual variation, Qur'anic correspondence, or historically significant interpretive contexts (Schoeler, 2006). Case selection is guided by the availability of multiple textual witnesses, the traceability of transmission information, and the relevance of the reports to at least one of the three proposed intertextual dimensions. In a future application, each selected report would be examined through a structured analytical matrix documenting textual correspondences, linguistic differences, transmission relationships, contextual evidence, and interpretive possibilities. The resulting interpretations would be evaluated against alternative explanations, including independent transmission, conventional narrative variation, and similarities arising from shared religious vocabulary. Methodological rigor would be pursued through source triangulation, transparent documentation of analytical decisions, and the explicit differentiation of established evidence from interpretive inference. Accordingly, the framework is proposed for assessment in terms of its conceptual coherence, procedural transparency, and explanatory usefulness rather than its capacity to establish authenticity independently of recognized hadith-critical methods.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Reconstructing Classical Hadith Matn Criticism through Intertextuality

The conceptual reconstruction undertaken in this study indicates that classical hadith matn criticism contains several analytical practices that can be productively reconsidered through intertextual theory (Lucas, 2004). These practices include the comparison of transmitted variants, the identification of anomalous formulations, the reconciliation of apparently conflicting reports, and the evaluation of textual coherence within broader scriptural and doctrinal contexts. Their significance lies not merely in the detection of textual discrepancies but also in their implicit recognition that the meaning and reliability of a transmitted report may depend upon its relationship with other available evidence. Brown (2008) demonstrates that early Sunni hadith critics engaged in substantive content criticism, even when their judgments were articulated through the language of transmission criticism.

This finding challenges interpretations that characterize classical hadith criticism as exclusively concerned with the external reliability of narrators (Azami, 1977). It also establishes an important historical foundation for investigating the relational dimensions of matn evaluation without projecting modern theoretical categories directly onto classical scholarship.

Nevertheless, recognizing relational elements within classical criticism does not justify equating traditional procedures with contemporary intertextuality (Goldziher, 1971). Classical hadith scholars generally approached textual comparison within an epistemological framework oriented toward the preservation, authentication, and interpretation of prophetic reports. By contrast, modern intertextual theories frequently investigate the production and transformation of meaning through relationships among texts, sometimes without prioritizing the recovery of an original utterance. Kristeva (1980) conceptualizes textuality through the interaction of multiple discourses, whereas Genette (1997) develops a differentiated account of relationships among texts. These perspectives provide conceptual instruments for identifying connections that extend beyond literal verbal resemblance. However, their application to hadith criticism requires methodological adaptation because prophetic reports possess historically situated claims of attribution and religious authority. The analytical task is therefore to distinguish genuine methodological correspondences from superficial terminological similarities.

One particularly relevant classical practice is the comparison of multiple narrations associated with the same prophetic statement or event (Juynboll, 1983). Such comparison can reveal variations in vocabulary, sentence structure, narrative sequencing, and explanatory detail. From an intertextual perspective, these differences constitute observable relationships among textual witnesses rather than merely deviations from a presumed standard version. Motzki (2005) demonstrates the importance of methodological caution when using transmitted reports to reconstruct early Islamic history, particularly because conclusions depend upon the quality and interpretation of available evidence.

Accordingly, textual variation should initially be documented without presuming that a longer narration is necessarily later, that a shorter narration is necessarily earlier, or that semantic differences automatically indicate historical transformation (Schoeler, 2006). This descriptive restraint is essential for preventing interpretive assumptions from predetermining conclusions about textual development.

Another significant point of convergence concerns the classical treatment of apparently conflicting traditions (Hallaq, 1997). Discussions of mukhtalif al-ḥadīth frequently involve reading individual reports in relation to other transmitted statements, relevant Qur'anic passages, and established interpretive principles. Such procedures demonstrate that the interpretation of a particular matn may require consideration of a broader textual environment. Intertextual theory can contribute to this process by distinguishing several possible relationships, including semantic complementarity, contextual differentiation, apparent contradiction, and interpretive reformulation. Yet the existence

of these relationships does not automatically determine how apparent conflicts should be resolved. Reconciliation, contextual specification, and judgments concerning relative evidentiary strength remain distinct operations. The contribution of intertextuality is therefore to clarify the structure of textual relationships before conclusions are drawn concerning their normative implications.

The investigation of anomalous or problematic textual formulations presents a further opportunity for methodological reconstruction (Brown, 2014). In classical hadith criticism, the evaluation of a report's unusual wording may depend upon comparison with other narrations, knowledge of transmitter practices, and judgments concerning the reliability of particular transmission pathways. Brown (2008) demonstrates that content-related concerns could operate within evaluations conventionally associated with narrator criticism. This historical observation suggests that textual anomalies should not be interpreted independently of their transmission environments. An intertextual approach can extend the analytical description of such anomalies by examining whether unusual formulations reflect lexical substitution, explanatory expansion, narrative compression, or relationships with other circulating discourses. Nevertheless, identifying a plausible explanation for an anomaly is not equivalent to proving that explanation historically. The evidentiary distinction between textual possibility and demonstrable transmission history must remain explicit.

A central finding of the present conceptual analysis is that classical relational practices and contemporary intertextuality operate at partially overlapping but epistemologically different levels (Motzki, 2002). Their overlap lies in the recognition that texts become more intelligible when examined alongside other relevant texts. Their difference concerns the objectives, assumptions, and standards by which these relationships are evaluated. Allen (2022) emphasizes the broad theoretical significance of intertextuality for understanding how textual meaning is constituted through relations rather than textual isolation.

Classical hadith criticism, however, also asks whether a particular formulation can be reliably attributed to an identified transmitter or ultimately to the Prophet (Robinson, 2003). Consequently, the proposed framework treats intertextuality as an analytical supplement rather than an alternative authentication system. This distinction prevents methodological innovation from becoming a retrospective claim that classical scholars were already practicing modern literary theory.

The reconstruction also reveals the need to differentiate textual comparison from intertextual explanation (Berg, 2000). Textual comparison establishes similarities and differences between available formulations, whereas intertextual explanation investigates the possible relationships responsible for, or illuminated by, those similarities and differences. For example, identifying parallel expressions in two narrations is a descriptive observation; arguing that one narration reflects the interpretive expansion of another is a historical hypothesis requiring additional evidence. Genette's (1997) theoretical distinctions are useful insofar as they encourage greater precision in classifying textual relationships. Nevertheless, a taxonomy developed for literary texts cannot independently determine the chronology, provenance, or authority of hadith reports. The present framework therefore introduces an evidentiary distinction between observable textual correspondences and proposed explanations of textual dependence.

The relationship between matn criticism and isnād analysis constitutes another essential component of this reconstruction (Lucas, 2004). Although intertextuality directs attention toward textual relationships, hadith transmission cannot be adequately understood without considering the individuals and networks through which reports circulated. The debate presented by Görke et al. (2012) demonstrates both the possibilities and the contested assumptions involved in reconstructing early Islamic traditions from surviving transmission evidence.

Their discussion underscores the importance of evaluating the relationship between textual variants and the historical distribution of their transmission pathways (Azami, 1977). Accordingly, an intertextual framework should not isolate semantic or narrative analysis from isnād evidence. Instead, it should investigate whether textual patterns correspond to identifiable transmission clusters, while acknowledging that such correlations require cautious historical interpretation.

The methodological implications of this reconstruction are particularly significant for contemporary hadith scholarship (Goldziher, 1971). Approaches that focus primarily on linguistic consistency risk overlooking the historical circumstances of transmission, while approaches concerned exclusively with transmission networks may insufficiently explore the interpretive significance of textual variation. The proposed framework seeks to address this analytical separation through a coordinated examination of textual form, semantic relationships, transmission evidence, and historical context. Its purpose is not to dissolve the distinction between authenticity and interpretation but to specify the contribution of each analytical dimension. In this respect, the reconstruction offers a structured means of integrating relational textual inquiry into established hadith-critical practices while retaining their historically distinctive epistemological concerns.

The principal result of this subsection is the identification of intertextuality as a reconstructive analytical perspective rather than a wholly new substitute for classical matn criticism (Juynboll, 1983). Classical scholarly practices provide precedents for relational evaluation, while contemporary intertextual theory supplies conceptual distinctions that may render those relationships more explicit and systematically examinable. The resulting synthesis suggests that methodological development should proceed through selective adaptation rather than unrestricted theoretical transplantation. It also establishes the foundational principle of the proposed framework: every intertextual relationship must be classified according to its textual characteristics, interpretive relevance, and evidentiary status. This principle provides the basis for the three dimensions developed in the following subsections.

2. Intra-Hadith Intertextuality: Textual Variants, Narrative Relationships, and Transmission Evidence

Intra-hadith intertextuality constitutes the first analytical dimension of the proposed framework and concerns relationships among multiple textual witnesses associated with a particular prophetic report, event, or thematic tradition (Juynboll, 1983). Its central premise is that transmitted variants should not be examined exclusively as isolated formulations competing for textual correctness. Rather, they form an interconnected body of evidence through which patterns of narration, semantic continuity, and textual differentiation may be investigated. This approach does not presume that all variants derive from a single recoverable original or that their relationships can be established through linguistic comparison alone. Instead, it begins with the systematic identification of available textual witnesses and their transmission characteristics. Such an orientation is consistent with Motzki's (2005) emphasis on the methodological requirements of historical investigation while extending the analytical focus toward the interpretive relationships among surviving formulations.

The first analytical operation involves identifying the textual boundaries of the reports under examination (Schoeler, 2006). Reports sharing a common theme do not necessarily represent variants of the same transmitted statement, just as reports containing similar expressions may originate from different narrative contexts. Accordingly, the researcher must distinguish direct textual variants from thematic parallels and broader conceptual correspondences. This distinction is particularly important because the inappropriate grouping of unrelated reports may produce artificial patterns of textual development. The proposed framework therefore requires preliminary documentation of the attributed speaker, reported occasion, principal narrative elements, available transmission pathways, and textual formulations. These criteria establish a controlled corpus within

which intertextual relationships can be investigated without assuming their historical equivalence in advance.

The second operation concerns the systematic comparison of linguistic and structural variation (Lucas, 2004). Differences may involve lexical substitution, syntactic rearrangement, omission, addition, explanatory elaboration, or changes in narrative perspective. Each category requires separate documentation because different forms of variation may have different interpretive and historical implications. A lexical substitution may preserve the principal meaning of a report, whereas an additional qualifying expression may significantly alter its apparent normative scope. Nevertheless, the significance of a difference cannot be determined solely by its formal classification. The relationship between linguistic form and contextual meaning must also be examined. Consequently, intra-hadith intertextuality treats textual variation as a multidimensional phenomenon rather than a simple measure of verbal agreement.

A third analytical consideration is the distinction between semantic stability and semantic transformation (Motzki, 2002). Multiple narrations may employ different formulations while preserving substantially similar propositions, ethical orientations, or narrative functions. Conversely, apparently minor differences may produce important interpretive consequences when they affect agency, obligation, temporal sequence, or the conditions under which a statement applies. Allen's (2022) account of intertextuality supports the broader proposition that meaning emerges through relationships among textual formulations, although the historical specificity of hadith transmission requires additional evidentiary controls. Within the proposed framework, semantic stability is evaluated through contextual comparison rather than through lexical equivalence alone. Semantic transformation, meanwhile, is treated initially as an interpretive observation rather than proof of chronological development.

The relationship between textual variants and transmission networks is essential for moving beyond purely descriptive comparison (Azami, 1977). If particular formulations consistently occur within identifiable transmission clusters, the correlation may provide evidence relevant to the history of a report. However, such correlations require careful examination of the available isnāds, the reliability of their documentation, and the possibility of shared sources or subsequent textual harmonization. Görke et al. (2012) demonstrate the importance of critically evaluating the evidence used to reconstruct early transmission histories. Their debate also illustrates why historical conclusions remain open to methodological disagreement even when substantial textual and transmission material is available. Consequently, the present framework distinguishes the identification of textual clusters from the stronger historical claim that those clusters establish a particular stage of transmission.

Intra-hadith intertextuality also requires attention to the possibility of narration by meaning, commonly discussed under the concept of riwāyah bi-al-maʿnā (Berg, 2000). The recognition that transmitted reports may preserve meaning through different verbal formulations complicates attempts to reconstruct a single authoritative wording from surviving textual witnesses. At the same time, the possibility of narration by meaning cannot serve as a universal explanation for every difference between reports. A methodological distinction must be maintained between variation compatible with semantic paraphrase and variation that introduces materially different claims. The proposed framework therefore evaluates possible paraphrastic relationships through linguistic comparison, narrative context, and transmission evidence rather than treating semantic resemblance as sufficient proof of a shared historical origin.

Narrative structure provides another important level of intra-hadith analysis (Robinson, 2003). Reports describing the same event may differ in the ordering of actions, the inclusion of dialogue, the identification of participants, or the explanatory details supplied by narrators. Such differences can

affect how the event is understood, even when its central narrative proposition remains recognizable. Genette's (1997) treatment of textual relationships offers conceptual resources for distinguishing forms of textual transformation, although his literary categories must be adapted cautiously to transmitted historical reports. In hadith criticism, narrative variation may result from selective recollection, abbreviation, explanatory narration, or the preservation of different aspects of an event. Determining which explanation is historically preferable requires evidence beyond narrative structure itself. Intertextual analysis contributes by making the alternatives explicit and preventing the premature reduction of narrative differences to contradiction or fabrication.

The evaluation of apparent contradictions constitutes a further application of intra-hadith intertextuality (Goldziher, 1971). Two reports may initially appear incompatible because they employ different expressions, address different circumstances, or emphasize different aspects of a practice. A relational analysis first identifies the precise propositions involved and determines whether the apparent contradiction concerns wording, factual description, temporal sequence, or normative implication. Only after these distinctions have been established should interpretive reconciliation or judgments concerning evidentiary preference be considered. Brown's (2008) demonstration of substantive content criticism in early hadith scholarship provides historical support for recognizing such evaluations as part of the broader hadith-critical tradition. Nevertheless, the present framework does not presume that every contradiction can be reconciled or that interpretive harmonization should override stronger historical evidence.

An important methodological safeguard concerns the danger of reconstructing textual development through circular reasoning (Brown, 2014). A researcher may classify one variant as original because it appears simpler and subsequently interpret more elaborate variants as expansions because they differ from the presumed original. Without independent chronological or transmission evidence, this procedure risks converting an initial assumption into an apparent historical conclusion. Motzki (2005) emphasizes the methodological complexity of dating Muslim traditions, making clear the need for explicit criteria when drawing historical inferences. Accordingly, the proposed framework requires competing explanations to be considered whenever the evidence permits them. The identification of an apparently coherent developmental sequence must therefore be distinguished from the demonstration that such a sequence actually occurred.

The principal contribution of intra-hadith intertextuality is its capacity to organize textual variation into a structured field of descriptive, interpretive, and historically assessable relationships (Donner, 2010). It extends conventional comparison by requiring the researcher to explain not only how textual witnesses differ but also which relationships can be established, which remain hypothetical, and what evidence would be necessary to support stronger conclusions. This analytical procedure produces a differentiated account of textual transmission without collapsing semantic coherence into authenticity. It also provides the first component of an integrated framework in which the relationships among hadith variants can subsequently be examined alongside Qur'anic discourse and historical context. The methodological value of this dimension ultimately depends upon its ability to generate transparent and contestable interpretations rather than predetermined judgments concerning textual origins.

3. Qur'an–Hadith Intertextuality: Semantic Correspondence and Normative Coherence

Qur'an–hadith intertextuality constitutes the second analytical dimension of the proposed framework and concerns the relationships between prophetic reports and Qur'anic discourse (Neuwirth, 2019). Unlike intra-hadith intertextuality, which examines relationships among transmitted reports, this dimension investigates how hadith formulations interact with scriptural concepts, expressions, narratives, and normative principles. The analytical relevance of this relationship arises from the central position of the Qur'an within Islamic intellectual traditions and

the historical importance of prophetic reports for scriptural interpretation. Brown (2009) demonstrates that the authority of hadith has developed within broader debates concerning revelation, religious knowledge, and normative interpretation. Accordingly, examining Qur'an–hadith relationships requires attention to both textual correspondences and the distinctive epistemological positions occupied by the two bodies of religious literature. The proposed framework approaches these relationships as objects of critical analysis rather than presuming that scriptural coherence alone establishes the authenticity of a transmitted report.

The first analytical category is lexical and semantic correspondence, which occurs when a hadith employs expressions, concepts, or linguistic structures that resemble Qur'anic discourse (Sinai, 2017). Such correspondences may involve shared terminology concerning ethical conduct, religious obligation, human responsibility, or theological principles. Nevertheless, the presence of similar vocabulary does not necessarily establish direct textual dependence. Words and expressions may belong to a broader linguistic environment or reflect conceptual conventions shared by multiple religious discourses. Kristeva's (1980) understanding of textual relationships provides a theoretical basis for examining the interaction of discourses, but it does not independently establish the historical direction of borrowing. Therefore, the proposed framework distinguishes lexical resemblance, conceptual correspondence, and demonstrable textual dependence as separate analytical categories.

A second category concerns thematic reinforcement, in which a prophetic report and one or more Qur'anic passages address related ethical, theological, or normative concerns (Shah, 2014). Such relationships may contribute to a broader understanding of a religious concept by placing different textual formulations in interpretive dialogue. However, thematic similarity must be established through careful semantic analysis rather than through the selection of isolated expressions that appear to support a predetermined conclusion. Allen (2022) emphasizes that intertextual relationships influence the construction of meaning within broader textual environments. Applied to hadith criticism, this insight suggests that the interpretation of a report may be enriched by examining the conceptual field within which related Qur'anic passages operate. Yet thematic reinforcement remains an interpretive relationship and should not be presented as independent evidence of historical attribution.

The third category involves normative specification and conceptual differentiation (Hallaq, 1997). Certain hadith reports appear to elaborate upon, qualify, or contextualize general principles articulated within Qur'anic discourse. From an intertextual perspective, these relationships may be examined as forms of semantic specification or normative interaction. Nevertheless, the interpretation of such relationships must remain sensitive to established distinctions within Islamic legal theory, particularly because the authority to specify or qualify a general scriptural statement is not determined by linguistic resemblance alone. Brown (2009) provides a broader account of the role of hadith in Islamic normative reasoning, demonstrating the importance of authority and authentication in the development of religious interpretation. Consequently, the proposed framework differentiates the identification of a possible normative relationship from the legal judgment that a particular report possesses sufficient authority to establish that relationship.

Apparent tensions between Qur'anic discourse and hadith formulations present a particularly important methodological challenge (Wansbrough, 1977). A report may initially appear inconsistent with a Qur'anic principle because of differences in linguistic scope, narrative context, historical circumstance, or interpretive assumptions. An intertextual approach does not begin by presuming either that the report must be rejected or that every apparent discrepancy can be harmonized. Instead, it identifies the precise level at which the tension arises and examines the relevant textual and contextual evidence. This procedure requires distinguishing semantic incompatibility from contextual differentiation and interpretive disagreement. Brown's (2008) analysis of early content

criticism demonstrates the historical significance of substantive textual evaluation, although it does not establish a universal rule for resolving Qur'an–hadith tensions. The proposed framework therefore treats apparent contradiction as a question requiring systematic investigation rather than immediate doctrinal resolution.

The analytical significance of Qur'an–hadith intertextuality becomes clearer when the relationship between scriptural meaning and historical interpretation is considered (Rahman, 1982). Qur'anic passages have been interpreted through diverse linguistic, theological, legal, and exegetical traditions, while hadith reports have circulated within similarly complex scholarly environments. Consequently, a proposed correspondence between a Qur'anic verse and a prophetic report may depend partly upon the interpretive assumptions adopted by the researcher. Genette's (1997) account of textual relationships provides useful conceptual distinctions, but the interpretation of religious texts also requires consideration of their reception within authoritative scholarly traditions. The proposed framework therefore recommends examining whether a perceived relationship is directly supported by textual features or emerges primarily from later interpretive conventions. This distinction does not diminish the importance of reception history but prevents subsequent interpretations from being mistaken for evidence of an original textual relationship.

A further consideration concerns the difference between conceptual coherence and historical authenticity (Brown, 2014). A report may express an ethical or theological proposition consistent with Qur'anic discourse without necessarily possessing a historically reliable attribution to the Prophet. Conversely, a report that initially appears difficult to reconcile with a particular interpretation of the Qur'an cannot be dismissed solely on the basis of that interpretive difficulty. The epistemological distinction is fundamental because textual compatibility and historical attribution are evaluated through different kinds of evidence. Motzki (2005) demonstrates the methodological importance of evaluating transmission histories when investigating the historical status of Muslim traditions. Accordingly, Qur'an–hadith intertextuality may contribute to assessing semantic relationships and interpretive plausibility, but it cannot replace the historical procedures necessary for evaluating attribution.

The framework also recognizes the possibility of multidirectional interpretive relationships (Berg, 2000). Although a hadith may be interpreted in light of Qur'anic discourse, the historical interpretation of Qur'anic passages has likewise been shaped by transmitted reports and subsequent scholarly discussions. This reciprocal relationship complicates any model that assumes a simple, unidirectional movement of meaning from one textual source to another. Kristeva (1980) and Allen (2022) provide conceptual resources for examining such interactions, particularly where textual meaning emerges through engagement with multiple discursive traditions. Nevertheless, a distinction must be maintained between interpretive reciprocity and demonstrable historical dependence. The existence of a later exegetical relationship does not establish that the corresponding interpretation was present at the earliest recoverable stage of a hadith's transmission.

Methodologically, Qur'an–hadith intertextuality requires a structured sequence of textual identification, semantic classification, contextual examination, and evidentiary evaluation (Neuwirth, 2019). The researcher first identifies Qur'anic passages that possess demonstrable lexical, thematic, or normative relevance to the hadith under investigation. The second stage classifies the relationship according to its principal characteristics, including reinforcement, specification, conceptual differentiation, or apparent tension. The third stage examines relevant linguistic and interpretive contexts to determine whether the relationship is supported by textual evidence or depends upon additional interpretive assumptions. Finally, the analysis evaluates the implications of the relationship without treating semantic coherence as a substitute for transmission-based authentication. This sequence provides a transparent procedure through which intertextual claims can be assessed and challenged.

The principal result of this dimension is the recognition that Qur'an–hadith relationships constitute a distinct field of intertextual analysis requiring both semantic precision and epistemological restraint (Sinai, 2017). Their significance extends beyond the identification of parallel vocabulary or the harmonization of apparently conflicting statements. They illuminate how prophetic reports participate in broader scriptural discourses while revealing the methodological limitations of interpreting textual relationships as direct evidence of authenticity. By distinguishing lexical, thematic, normative, and reception-based relationships, the proposed framework offers a more differentiated approach to Qur'an–hadith analysis. This dimension complements intra-hadith intertextuality by extending the investigation from relationships among transmitted reports to the broader scriptural environment in which their meanings have been interpreted.

4. Historical-Discursive Intertextuality: Contextualizing Hadith Transmission and Interpretation

Historical-discursive intertextuality constitutes the third analytical dimension of the proposed framework and examines the relationships between transmitted hadith texts and the historical, intellectual, and social environments within which they circulated (Donner, 2010). Its central premise is that textual meaning cannot always be adequately reconstructed through linguistic comparison alone, particularly when reports concern practices, institutions, disputes, or conceptual categories that developed within changing historical circumstances. However, contextual analysis introduces a significant methodological challenge because the surviving textual evidence frequently postdates the events or statements it purports to describe. Motzki (2005) emphasizes the difficulties involved in dating Muslim traditions and reconstructing their historical origins. Consequently, historical-discursive intertextuality must distinguish the historical circumstances represented within a report from the independently established circumstances of its transmission, documentation, and reception.

The first analytical concern involves differentiating the reported setting of a prophetic tradition from its recoverable transmission history (Robinson, 2003). A narration may describe an event attributed to the Prophet while surviving in compilations produced considerably later. The narrative's internal description of an event therefore cannot automatically be treated as independent confirmation of the circumstances in which the report originated. Historical analysis must instead examine the available documentary evidence, transmission pathways, and relevant chronological information. Görke et al. (2012) demonstrate the importance of methodological debate concerning the reconstruction of early Islamic reports, particularly where scholars disagree about the historical reach of surviving transmission evidence. Their discussion highlights the necessity of distinguishing a plausible reconstruction from a historically established conclusion. Within the proposed framework, this distinction prevents contextual interpretation from becoming an unexamined assumption about textual origins.

A second concern involves the relationship between transmitted reports and the intellectual environments of their narrators, collectors, and interpreters (Berg, 2000). Hadith texts circulated within communities engaged in legal reasoning, theological discussion, ethical instruction, and the preservation of religious knowledge. These environments may have influenced how reports were selected, organized, explained, and interpreted. Nevertheless, identifying a report within a particular scholarly context does not establish that its wording originated in that context. Brown (2009) demonstrates the complexity of hadith authority across different periods of Islamic intellectual history, providing an important background for examining the relationship between transmission and scholarly reception. Historical-discursive analysis must therefore differentiate the circulation of a report within an intellectual environment from claims concerning the production of its original formulation.

The third analytical category concerns discursive correspondence between hadith formulations and broader religious debates (Goldziher, 1971). A report may employ concepts or argumentative structures that resemble discussions found in legal, theological, or ethical literature. Such similarities can provide valuable evidence concerning the interpretation and reception of a tradition, especially when they occur within identifiable historical settings. However, the inference that a report was created in response to a particular controversy requires stronger evidence than conceptual resemblance alone. Kristeva's (1980) understanding of discourse offers a theoretical perspective on the interaction of textual meanings, while historical hadith scholarship provides the evidentiary standards necessary for evaluating claims of origin and transmission. The proposed framework combines these perspectives by treating discursive resemblance as an analytical observation whose historical implications must be independently examined.

A further methodological issue concerns the relationship between historical context and narrative formulation (Schoeler, 2006). Reports describing social practices, communal disputes, or legal circumstances may contain explanatory elements that help later audiences understand the significance of the narrated event. Such elements can potentially illuminate the interpretive environments through which a tradition circulated. Nevertheless, the identification of explanatory language does not automatically demonstrate that it was added at a later stage. Textual expansion, narrative abbreviation, and contextual clarification may produce similar observable patterns, making historical differentiation dependent upon additional evidence. Motzki (2005) underscores the importance of critically evaluating the assumptions employed in reconstructing the development of transmitted traditions. Accordingly, the proposed framework requires researchers to distinguish observable narrative features from hypotheses concerning the historical processes that produced them.

Historical-discursive intertextuality also requires attention to the relationship between textual transmission and reception history (Motzki, 2002). A hadith may acquire new interpretive significance as scholars employ it in different intellectual or institutional contexts. These developments can reveal changes in emphasis, application, and conceptual association without necessarily implying alterations to the transmitted wording. Allen (2022) provides a theoretical basis for examining the relationship between textual meaning and changing interpretive environments. Applied to hadith scholarship, this perspective allows the researcher to investigate how the same report may function within different scholarly discussions. Nevertheless, reception history must remain analytically distinct from transmission history. Evidence that a report was interpreted in a particular manner during a later period does not establish that the same interpretation characterized its earliest circulation.

The relationship between historical reconstruction and textual dating represents one of the most demanding aspects of this dimension (Juynboll, 1983). Attempts to establish the chronology of transmitted reports may rely on combinations of textual features, transmission distributions, documentary evidence, and contextual information. Each form of evidence possesses different strengths and limitations. The methodological debate examined by Görke et al. (2012) illustrates why the reconstruction of early Islamic traditions remains contested even when researchers employ sophisticated historical approaches. The proposed framework therefore avoids assigning dates to textual formulations solely because their content appears compatible with a particular historical controversy. Instead, chronological claims must be supported by evidence whose relevance and limitations can be explicitly demonstrated. Historical-discursive intertextuality contributes to this process by identifying possible contextual relationships without treating those relationships as conclusive dating criteria.

Another important issue concerns the danger of retrospective interpretation (Rahman, 1982). Modern researchers may identify social, political, or theological meanings in transmitted reports that reflect contemporary analytical concerns more strongly than the historical circumstances of their circulation. Such interpretations may possess contemporary intellectual significance, but they should not automatically be presented as reconstructions of original meaning. Genette (1997) and Allen (2022) provide theoretical resources for examining textual relationships across interpretive contexts, yet historical inquiry requires additional safeguards against anachronism. The proposed framework therefore recommends separating the historical meanings supported by available evidence from subsequent interpretive possibilities. This distinction allows contemporary analysis to remain intellectually productive without confusing present-day interpretation with historical demonstration.

The operational procedure for historical-discursive intertextuality begins with the identification of the report's recoverable documentary and transmission contexts (Lucas, 2004). It then examines relevant historical materials that may illuminate the concepts, practices, or controversies associated with the report. The third stage identifies possible discursive correspondences and evaluates whether they reflect demonstrable historical relationships or broader thematic similarities. The final stage distinguishes conclusions concerning transmission, reception, and interpretation according to their respective evidentiary foundations. Throughout this process, the researcher must document uncertainties, consider competing historical explanations, and avoid treating the absence of evidence as proof of a particular developmental hypothesis. Such procedures are consistent with the methodological caution emphasized by Motzki (2005) and Görke et al. (2012).

The principal contribution of historical-discursive intertextuality lies in its capacity to situate transmitted reports within broader contexts without reducing their meanings to speculative historical explanations (Wansbrough, 1977). This dimension extends intra-hadith and Qur'an–hadith analysis by investigating the circumstances under which textual relationships become historically and interpretively significant. It also establishes an important epistemological boundary: contextual plausibility is not equivalent to historical verification. The proposed framework therefore treats historical-discursive relationships as a distinct category of evidence whose explanatory significance depends upon independent documentation and transparent reasoning. Together with the preceding dimensions, this approach provides the conceptual foundation for an integrated model of intertextual matn criticism.

5. Toward an Integrated Intertextual Framework for Hadith Matn Criticism

The synthesis of the preceding analyses produces an integrated intertextual framework consisting of three complementary dimensions: intra-hadith intertextuality, Qur'an–hadith intertextuality, and historical-discursive intertextuality (Shah, 2014). Each dimension addresses a different category of textual relationship while contributing to a broader understanding of hadith transmission and interpretation. Intra-hadith analysis examines relationships among transmitted variants, Qur'an–hadith analysis investigates connections between prophetic reports and scriptural discourse, and historical-discursive analysis considers the relationship between transmitted texts and their recoverable historical environments. The integration of these dimensions responds to the methodological problem identified in the Introduction: textual relationships are frequently examined through separate procedures without a unified framework that specifies their respective evidentiary functions. Drawing upon intertextual theory (Allen, 2022; Genette, 1997) and historical hadith scholarship (Brown, 2008; Motzki, 2005), the proposed model organizes these relationships within a coordinated analytical structure while preserving the distinction between interpretation and authentication.

The first methodological principle of the integrated framework is the differentiation of textual evidence according to its analytical function (Hallaq, 1997). Observable similarities between reports

constitute descriptive evidence, whereas explanations concerning their semantic relationships represent interpretive propositions. Historical claims concerning textual dependence, chronological development, or attribution require additional evidence beyond the identification of textual resemblance. This distinction is essential because the same textual feature may support several competing explanations. For example, shared terminology may indicate common religious vocabulary, thematic convergence, or a historically traceable relationship between particular textual witnesses. Without independent evidence, the selection of one explanation over another risks becoming speculative. The framework therefore requires researchers to distinguish observations, interpretations, and historical inferences at every stage of analysis.

The second principle concerns the integration of matn analysis with transmission evidence (Motzki, 2002). Although intertextuality emphasizes relationships among texts, hadith scholarship requires attention to the historical processes through which those texts were transmitted. Brown (2008) demonstrates that early hadith criticism involved substantive textual evaluation, while Motzki (2005) and Görke et al. (2012) highlight the methodological importance of critically assessing transmission histories. These contributions indicate that textual and transmission evidence should be examined in relation to one another rather than treated as competing sources of authority. Accordingly, the integrated framework incorporates available isnād information into the analysis of textual variation and historical relationships. However, it does not presume that every textual correspondence can be explained through an identifiable transmission pathway. The absence of sufficient evidence must remain a legitimate analytical conclusion.

The third principle involves establishing an operational sequence that prevents interpretive conclusions from preceding textual documentation (Jaakkola, 2020). The analysis begins by defining the relevant corpus and identifying its textual witnesses. It subsequently documents linguistic and narrative variation, maps relevant Qur'anic correspondences, and examines historically supportable contextual relationships. These observations are then subjected to comparative interpretation and evidentiary evaluation. Such sequencing reflects the distinction between conceptual development and methodological application emphasized in discussions of theory-building research (Jaakkola, 2020). Its purpose is to ensure that the proposed framework can be implemented through explicit procedures rather than remaining an abstract theoretical formulation. Nevertheless, the sequence should remain sufficiently flexible to accommodate differences in textual availability, transmission complexity, and the interpretive characteristics of individual hadith reports.

The fourth principle concerns the classification of intertextual relationships according to their explanatory strength (Genette, 1997). Not all correspondences possess equivalent evidentiary significance, and a framework that treats every similarity as equally meaningful would risk generating excessive or unsupported interpretations. The present model therefore distinguishes directly observable textual relationships from relationships inferred through contextual interpretation and those supported by independently assessable historical evidence. This differentiation is especially important when evaluating possible textual dependence or chronological development. Genette's (1997) theoretical account of textual relationships provides a conceptual starting point for classification, but the specific evidentiary hierarchy must be adapted to the historical characteristics of hadith transmission. The resulting classification is not intended to produce a numerical measure of authenticity. Rather, it provides a transparent means of communicating the degree of support available for particular intertextual claims.

The fifth principle concerns the evaluation of competing explanations (Brown, 2014). Textual variation may arise from several processes, including narration by meaning, abbreviation, explanatory elaboration, selective transmission, or the preservation of distinct accounts. Similarly, semantic correspondence between hadith and Qur'anic discourse may reflect shared conceptual language rather than direct textual dependence. Historical-discursive relationships may likewise

indicate reception and interpretation without establishing the circumstances of a report's original formulation. Motzki (2005) demonstrates the importance of methodological scrutiny in historical reconstruction, while Görke et al. (2012) illustrate how different assessments of evidence may produce competing conclusions. The proposed framework therefore requires alternative explanations to be considered before a particular interpretation is preferred. This requirement strengthens analytical accountability by preventing intertextuality from becoming an unrestricted instrument for producing speculative historical narratives.

The sixth principle is the separation of authenticity assessment from interpretive coherence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A report may display strong semantic consistency with Qur'anic discourse and other transmitted traditions without possessing sufficient historical evidence to establish its attribution. Conversely, a historically well-supported report may present interpretive difficulties that require further linguistic or contextual examination. These possibilities demonstrate why authenticity and meaning must be investigated through related but distinguishable procedures. Brown (2009) emphasizes the historical complexity of hadith authority, while Brown (2008) demonstrates the importance of substantive textual criticism within the classical tradition. The integrated framework preserves this distinction by assigning intertextual analysis a complementary role in textual evaluation and interpretation. It therefore rejects the assumption that semantic harmony automatically demonstrates authenticity or that interpretive difficulty necessarily establishes inauthenticity.

The seventh principle concerns methodological transparency and reproducibility (Robinson, 2003). Although qualitative textual interpretation necessarily involves scholarly judgment, its analytical procedures should remain sufficiently explicit to permit independent evaluation. Researchers should document the textual witnesses examined, the criteria used to identify relationships, the interpretive assumptions adopted, and the evidence supporting historical conclusions. This requirement is consistent with the broader principles of qualitative research design discussed by Creswell and Poth (2018). In the context of hadith criticism, transparency is particularly important because differences in corpus selection or transmission evaluation may substantially affect the resulting interpretation. The proposed framework therefore recommends a structured analytical matrix that records textual observations separately from explanatory hypotheses and final judgments. Such documentation allows disagreements to be traced to specific evidentiary or interpretive decisions rather than remaining concealed within generalized claims about textual coherence.

The eighth principle concerns the scope and limitations of methodological integration (Sinai, 2017). The proposed framework is not designed to replace classical hadith authentication procedures, nor does it claim that contemporary intertextual theory provides an independently sufficient basis for reconstructing early Islamic history. Its contribution is more specific: it offers an organized analytical procedure for examining relationships among textual variants, Qur'anic discourse, and historically relevant interpretive contexts. This distinction is important because methodological innovation does not necessarily require the displacement of established scholarly practices. Instead, innovation may emerge through the clarification of previously dispersed procedures, the introduction of more precise analytical categories, and the identification of relationships that conventional approaches have not systematically integrated. The present framework therefore advances intertextuality as a complementary mode of critical inquiry whose explanatory value remains subject to evidentiary assessment.

The ninth principle concerns the need for empirical methodological demonstration (Azami, 1977). Although the conceptual synthesis establishes the internal structure of the proposed framework, its practical usefulness cannot be fully assessed without application to a defined corpus of hadith reports. Such application should include reports exhibiting multiple textual variants, identifiable Qur'anic correspondences, and historically relevant interpretive contexts. The analytical results

should then be compared with those obtainable through conventional textual comparison and established hadith-critical procedures. This comparative design would make it possible to determine whether the integrated framework generates additional explanatory insights or merely reformulates conclusions already available through existing methods. Accordingly, the present conceptual development should be understood as establishing a testable methodological model rather than demonstrating its superiority in advance.

The final result of this study is the formulation of an integrated intertextual framework that extends hadith matn criticism from isolated textual comparison toward the systematic investigation of relationships among transmitted reports, scriptural discourse, and historical interpretation (Shah, 2014). Its proposed contribution consists of three interconnected developments: a differentiated classification of intertextual relationships, an operational procedure for examining their interpretive significance, and an evidentiary structure that separates textual observation from historical authentication. These developments bring classical hadith-critical concerns into dialogue with contemporary textual theory without collapsing their distinct epistemological foundations. The framework consequently offers a basis for further methodological refinement and corpus-based evaluation. Its broader significance lies in demonstrating how intertextuality may contribute to contemporary hadith studies through analytical precision, historical caution, and the transparent evaluation of competing interpretations.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the hadith concerning women's request for a designated educational gathering with the Prophet Muhammad provides a significant textual basis for examining the relationship between women's agency and equitable access to religious knowledge in the formative Muslim community. Through a sociohistorical reading of the narration transmitted by Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, three interconnected findings emerge. First, the women's collective request reflects their capacity to identify an imbalance in educational opportunities and articulate a practical response. Second, the Prophet's accommodation of their request illustrates pedagogical responsiveness through the allocation of a specific opportunity for instruction. Third, the subsequent question-and-answer exchange demonstrates that women's participation extended beyond attendance to active engagement with religious teaching. Taken together, these findings suggest that the educational encounter represented in the hadith involved a dynamic relationship between learners' initiative, instructional authority, and opportunities for meaningful participation.

The study contributes to contemporary scholarship on gender and Islamic education by moving beyond normative affirmations of women's educational rights toward an analysis of the processes through which access to knowledge was requested, negotiated, and accommodated. The integration of women's agency, pedagogical responsiveness, and substantive educational equity offers an interpretive framework for understanding prophetic instruction as a relational practice responsive to learners' expressed needs. Importantly, the findings challenge the assumption that religious authority and women's agency necessarily operate in opposition. The narration instead represents women's initiative as exercised within an acknowledged religious framework, while their questions contributed to the development of the recorded instructional exchange. Nevertheless, this interpretation does not establish that the formative Muslim community possessed a comprehensive system of gender-equitable education. Its theoretical significance lies in identifying historically transmitted practices that can inform, without directly determining, contemporary discussions of educational justice and inclusive Islamic pedagogy.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. First, the analysis centers on a specific hadith and selected parallel narrations, which cannot independently represent the full diversity of women's educational experiences during the Prophet's lifetime. Second, the historical reconstruction depends

primarily on transmitted textual accounts rather than contemporaneous documentary or material evidence, limiting the extent to which the reported encounter can be situated within broader social structures. Third, variations in wording, narrative emphasis, and thematic placement across hadith collections introduce interpretive complexities that cannot be completely resolved through textual comparison alone. Fourth, the application of contemporary theories of agency and participatory justice to a seventh-century religious context carries a risk of conceptual anachronism. Although the study addresses this concern by distinguishing textual evidence from theoretical interpretation, its conclusions remain interpretive rather than definitive historical generalizations. These limitations underscore the need to differentiate the educational practices represented in prophetic reports from claims about the overall distribution of gendered authority in early Muslim society.

Future research should extend the analysis through a systematic examination of additional hadith narrations documenting women's educational initiatives, direct questioning, and participation in religious instruction. Comparative studies involving different hadith collections and classical commentaries could clarify how women's educational agency was represented, transmitted, and interpreted across successive generations of Muslim scholarship. Further investigation should also examine the relationship between access to prophetic instruction and the subsequent development of women's authority as hadith transmitters, teachers, and interpreters. From a contemporary perspective, research may explore how the principles of learner initiative, pedagogical responsiveness, and meaningful participation can inform educational practices in Islamic institutions without reducing historical narratives to prescriptive modern policies. Such inquiries would help develop a more historically grounded understanding of gender and knowledge in Islamic intellectual traditions while opening productive dialogue between hadith studies, gender scholarship, and theories of educational justice

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