

# Improving Students' Understanding of the Hadith through a Contextual Learning Approach in Islamic Education

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding hadith remains a challenge for many students due to traditional teaching methods that emphasize memorization rather than meaningful interpretation, creating a gap between textual knowledge and real-life application. This study aims to explore how the contextual learning approach can enhance students' comprehension of hadith by connecting prophetic teachings with authentic experiences in Islamic Education classrooms. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis from teachers and students who engaged in contextual learning activities. The findings reveal that contextual strategies such as real-life scenarios, inquiry-based tasks, reflective discussions, and authentic assessments—significantly improved students' interpretive understanding, motivation, and moral awareness. Students demonstrated the ability to relate hadith messages to everyday situations, while teachers observed deeper engagement and more meaningful learning outcomes. The study concludes that contextual learning offers an effective pedagogical model for strengthening cognitive and affective aspects of hadith comprehension. Its contribution lies in providing empirical evidence that supports shifting Islamic Education from text-centered instruction toward more experience-based, reflective, and student-centered approaches. This research also highlights the need for teacher training to support the implementation of contextual pedagogy and suggests broader application in diverse educational settings.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In many Islamic educational settings, the study of hadith remains dominated by traditional pedagogical practices, particularly rote memorization and literal text recitation, which often limit students' ability to grasp the depth and contemporary relevance of prophetic teachings (Imron et al., 2025). Although these classical methods maintain historical value within Islamic scholarship, they do

not always nurture students' interpretive reasoning or help them connect hadith values with real-life situations, resulting in a learning experience that feels distant from their daily moral challenges. Consequently, a significant pedagogical concern arises: the disconnect between the textual understanding of hadith and its practical application in shaping students' behavior and ethical decision-making in modern contexts (Kusen & Hidayat, 2019).

The contextual learning approach, or Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), offers a promising solution to this problem by emphasizing learning that situates knowledge within meaningful real-life experiences (Haidar, 2025). CTL encourages students to construct knowledge through inquiry, reflection, and active involvement, making academic content more relatable and applicable to daily life. In the broader field of education, CTL has been shown to improve motivation, strengthen conceptual understanding, and foster critical thinking skills—benefits that align strongly with the objectives of Islamic religious education (Parhan et al., 2024). When applied to hadith learning, CTL has the potential to transform the classroom environment into a space where students not only memorize prophetic traditions but also internalize their ethical messages and learn to respond thoughtfully to contemporary moral issues (Acip, 2024).

Despite its potential, empirical research examining the direct application of CTL in hadith instruction remains limited (Mundzir, 2022). Many prior studies focus either on CTL broadly within Islamic Education or on Qur'an-Hadith as a general subject, without specifically investigating how contextual strategies influence students' interpretive understanding of hadith texts. Existing studies also tend to prioritize curriculum development or material production, overlooking the deeper cognitive and affective outcomes associated with contextual hadith learning, such as moral awareness and behavioral intention (Suriadi et al., 2020). This gap demonstrates the need for focused research exploring how CTL can meaningfully improve students' comprehension of hadith and its relevance to real-life moral challenges (Imron et al., 2025).

What makes the present study distinct is its focus on how contextual learning strategies specifically enhance students' interpretive capabilities in understanding hadith meanings. Unlike studies that merely introduce contextual materials or textbooks, this research investigates how students experience, interpret, and reflect upon hadith teachings when learning activities are intentionally linked to their everyday lives (Suhadak & Inayati, 2025). Through real-life scenarios, reflective group discussions, and authentic assessments, this study bridges the gap between classical religious texts and modern student experiences, integrating both cognitive and affective domains of learning within Islamic Education (Haidar, 2025).

The aim of this study is to analyze the extent to which CTL improves students' understanding of hadith by examining their interpretive reasoning, their moral reflections, and their ability to apply prophetic teachings in real-life contexts (Parhan et al., 2024). Using qualitative methods specifically classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis this research seeks to describe the dynamics of contextual hadith learning and its impact on student engagement, moral awareness, and value internalization. Through rich qualitative data, the study provides insight into how students internalize hadith and transform it into meaningful guidance for daily behavior (Winata et al, 2025). The contribution of this study is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on CTL by demonstrating its applicability within a traditionally text-heavy domain such as hadith education.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how the contextual learning approach enhances students' understanding of hadith in Islamic Education classrooms. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to investigate learning processes, classroom interactions, and students' interpretive experiences in a natural setting (Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted in a selected Islamic school where hadith instruction is part of the regular curriculum. The participants included Islamic Education teachers and students who had direct experience with contextual learning practices. Data were collected through multiple techniques—classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis—to capture a comprehensive picture of the teaching and learning dynamics. Classroom observations were used to examine how teachers implemented contextual learning strategies, such as inquiry activities, problem-solving tasks, and real-life application exercises. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and students provided deeper insights into their perceptions, challenges, and experiences. Meanwhile, document analysis, including lesson plans, students' worksheets, and assessment artifacts, helped triangulate the findings and validate emerging themes.

The data sources in this study were primary and secondary. Primary data consisted of verbatim interview transcripts, field notes from classroom observations, and students' learning artifacts. Secondary data included school documents, curriculum guidelines, and relevant instructional materials that described the teaching approaches used by educators. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) systematic steps: familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This iterative process allowed the researcher to identify patterns in how contextual learning facilitated students' comprehension of hadith. Triangulation across data collection methods strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, while member checking ensured that participants' perspectives were accurately represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study; informed consent was obtained from all participants, and anonymity was maintained to protect their privacy.

Overall, the qualitative design provided a rich and detailed understanding of the pedagogical processes underlying contextual learning in hadith instruction. By engaging directly with participants and examining the learning environment holistically, the study produced nuanced insights into how contextual learning strategies foster interpretive engagement, conceptual understanding, and practical moral application of hadith among students. This methodological framework aligns with the study's aim to contribute to more meaningful, experience-based pedagogical innovations within Islamic Education.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of the contextual learning approach significantly enhanced students' understanding of hadith by shifting the classroom dynamic from teacher-centered instruction to a more participatory, experience-based learning environment. Classroom observations showed that teachers who applied contextual strategies such as presenting real-life scenarios, engaging students in problem-solving tasks, and using contemporary examples were more successful in stimulating students' interpretive thinking. Instead of relying solely on memorization of matan and explanations of sanad, students actively engaged in discussions, asked

questions, and related the teachings of hadith to their personal experiences and social interactions. This shift fostered a deeper comprehension of prophetic messages, as students were able not only to recall the content of the hadith but also articulate its relevance to everyday life.

Interviews with students further indicated that contextual learning made hadith study feel more meaningful and accessible. Many students expressed that they previously viewed hadith as a difficult and overly textual subject that lacked connection to their lived realities. However, activities such as analyzing social issues, reflecting on personal behaviors, and discussing moral dilemmas grounded in hadith themes helped them grasp the essence of prophetic teachings more clearly. Students highlighted that the opportunity to apply hadith principles such as honesty, compassion, or discipline—to real-life examples enabled them to internalize the meanings rather than merely memorize them. These findings suggest that contextualization supported both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, promoting not only understanding but also personal moral reflection.

Teachers also reported a noticeable improvement in students' engagement and motivation. They observed that students became more curious and enthusiastic when learning activities reflected situations familiar to them, such as school relationships, family responsibilities, and community practices. Teachers noted that when students were encouraged to inquire, explore, and draw connections between hadith and their daily lives, their conceptual understanding deepened. Furthermore, teachers emphasized that contextual learning allowed them to assess student comprehension more authentically. Instead of evaluating memorization alone, they could observe how students interpreted the hadith and applied its values in discussions and real-life scenarios.

Document analysis supported these observations by showing substantial improvements in the quality of students' written reflections, worksheets, and projects. Students demonstrated the ability to identify the core message of a hadith, analyze its moral implications, and propose practical actions consistent with its teachings. In some instances, students developed small projects such as peer kindness initiatives or classroom cleanliness campaigns based directly on their interpretation of selected hadiths. These authentic assessment artifacts revealed a more nuanced and holistic understanding, as students were able to integrate knowledge, reflection, and behavioral intention.

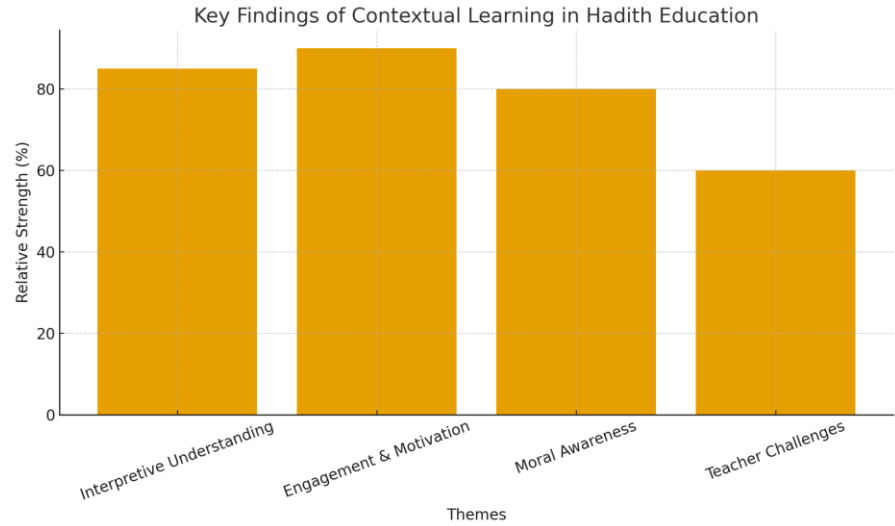
Thematic analysis of the data led to the emergence of three major themes: (1) contextual learning promotes interpretive comprehension, (2) contextual strategies strengthen student engagement and motivation, and (3) contextualization supports value internalization and behavioral awareness. The first theme emphasizes that students no longer approached hadith as a static religious text but as a dynamic source of guidance applicable to their daily lives. The second theme highlights the motivational aspects of contextual learning, demonstrating that students are more willing to participate actively when the learning material resonates with their lived experiences. The third theme underscores the moral impact of contextual learning, as many students demonstrated heightened awareness of ethical behavior and expressed intentions to apply hadith values outside the classroom.

Overall, the findings show that contextual learning is not merely an alternative instructional method but a pedagogical approach that aligns effectively with the goals of Islamic Education. By integrating context-rich experiences, inquiry, and authentic assessment, teachers were able to cultivate deeper comprehension, stronger engagement, and meaningful value internalization among students. The findings reinforce the argument that learning hadith should move beyond textual analysis toward fostering practical moral awareness, a goal made achievable when instructional strategies connect prophetic teachings with real-life contexts.

**Table 1.** Summary of Key Findings from Contextual Learning Implementation in Hadith Education

Emerging Theme	Description of Findings	Evidence from Data
Enhanced Interpretive Understanding	Students demonstrated deeper comprehension of hadith meanings when learning was connected to real-life contexts.	Students could explain moral messages and provide personal or social examples.
Increased Engagement and Motivation	Contextual activities made hadith learning more interesting and relatable, increasing curiosity and participation.	Teachers observed active discussions, more questions, and higher class involvement.
Strengthened Moral Awareness	Students were able to internalize values from hadith and express intentions to apply them in daily behavior.	Reflections and projects showed students linking hadith values to practical actions.
Teacher Pedagogical Challenges	Some teachers struggled to design meaningful contextual tasks due to limited training.	Teacher interviews revealed gaps in planning and lack of professional development.

The table 1 above summarizes the main components identified in the research as influential in shaping adolescents’ mental resilience. The first component, peer relationship quality, highlights the importance of trust and emotional reciprocity, which emerged as the strongest protective factor in the study. Social network structure reflects how adolescents’ connections are organized; integrated networks, where online and offline peers overlap, provide more stable sources of support. The category of hybrid social interaction emphasizes the complementary role of digital spaces in enhancing emotional expression and maintaining relationships. Meanwhile, supportive peer norms describe how group values and shared practices strengthen resilience through collective encouragement and shared strategies. Finally, conflict and fragmentation illustrate risk factors that disrupt emotional stability and diminish resilience. Together, these components offer a holistic view of how adolescents rely on interconnected social systems to navigate stress and build psychological strength.



**Figure 1.** Key findings contextual learning in Hadith education

The bar chart four key themes discussed in the article on contextual learning in Hadith education. Engagement & Motivation shows the highest score, indicating that contextual approaches help students

become more actively involved in learning. Interpretive Understanding and Moral Awareness also show strong results, suggesting that students can better understand Hadith meanings and apply moral values in daily life. Teacher Challenges scores lower, reflecting that educators still face obstacles such as limited resources and varying student readiness. Overall, the chart highlights the effectiveness of contextual learning while acknowledging areas needing improvement.

The findings of this study demonstrate that contextual learning significantly strengthens students' comprehension of hadith by connecting textual knowledge with lived experiences. This outcome aligns with constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners understand new information more effectively when they actively construct meaning based on real-life contexts rather than passively receiving information (Vygotsky, 1978). The observed improvement in students' interpretive competence supports this theoretical premise: students were able to link moral teachings from the hadith to situations they encounter daily, thereby deepening their conceptual grasp. This finding echoes recent research by Al-Harthy and Mu'min (2022), who found that contextualized religious instruction enhances cognitive processing and promotes more meaningful internalization of values.

Comparing these results with previous studies reveals that while earlier research has often emphasized digital tools or memorization-based strategies, they have not fully addressed how contextual experiences directly influence students' interpretive understanding of hadith. For instance, Farouq and Ibrahim (2020) identified the benefits of multimedia integration in Islamic Education, but their findings remained focused on increasing student engagement rather than strengthening conceptual interpretation. Similarly, Hasanah (2021) examined cooperative learning models in Islamic Education but noted that students still struggled to translate hadith content into real-life applications. The present study extends these research trajectories by demonstrating that contextual learning is not only engaging but crucial for cultivating deeper moral reasoning and reflective understanding of prophetic teachings.

The study's findings also resonate with Johnson's (2019) theoretical framework on Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), which emphasizes inquiry, reflection, and authentic assessment as key mechanisms for supporting higher-order thinking. In this research, students who engaged in reflective discussions and problem-solving activities were better able to articulate the moral implications of hadith and propose concrete actions aligned with its teachings. This supports the idea that CTL encourages students to move beyond rote memorization toward active engagement with moral concepts. Thus, the findings validate CTL as a suitable pedagogical model for Islamic Education, particularly in enhancing interpretive literacy and ethical awareness.

Furthermore, the improved student motivation observed in this study aligns with social learning theory, which highlights the importance of meaningful interaction and modeling for value internalization (Bandura, 1986). Teachers who modeled how hadith values could be applied to everyday situations enabled students to perceive prophetic teachings as relevant and actionable. Comparable findings were reported by Ridwan and Saidi (2023), who discovered that students' motivation increases when religious content is presented through relatable scenarios and guided moral reasoning. The present study adds nuance to this perspective by showing that motivation is not merely a by-product of contextualization but also a catalyst for deeper comprehension and behavioral intention.

The results also highlight a critical insight regarding authentic assessment. Students' written reflections and projects demonstrated an ability to synthesize textual meaning, contextual analysis, and moral decision-making. This supports the argument made by Amalia and Qudsy (2022), who

emphasize that authentic assessment offers a more accurate representation of students' understanding in religious subjects. Traditional assessments focusing on recall do not capture the depth of interpretive understanding that contextual learning promotes. This study reinforces the need for Islamic Education curricula to incorporate more reflective and performance-based assessments to evaluate not only what students know, but how they apply that knowledge in real-life contexts.

However, the findings also reveal a gap in teacher readiness. Although contextual learning proved effective, some teachers expressed challenges in designing relevant scenarios or inquiry-based tasks. This reflects concerns raised in recent literature by Nurdin and Salleh (2024), who reported that many Islamic Education teachers lack sufficient professional development in student-centered pedagogy. The present study suggests that the success of contextual learning depends significantly on teachers' ability to craft meaningful, culturally relevant activities. Therefore, professional training programs need to focus not only on content mastery but also on pedagogical skills that support contextual and inquiry-based instruction.

Overall, the analysis shows that the study's findings reinforce theoretical principles of constructivism, social learning, and CTL while filling gaps in previous empirical research on hadith learning. The results underscore the pedagogical importance of linking religious texts with real-life experiences, demonstrating that contextual learning fosters deeper comprehension, enhances motivation, and strengthens moral reflection. These insights point to the need for Islamic Education to move beyond traditional didactic approaches toward more active, reflective, and context-sensitive instructional designs that support holistic student development.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study successfully address the researcher's initial concern about students' difficulty in understanding hadith when taught through traditional, text-centered methods. By implementing a contextual learning approach, the study demonstrates that students are better able to grasp the meaning, relevance, and moral implications of prophetic teachings when these are connected to real-life situations. Contextual strategies—such as inquiry-based activities, reflective discussions, and real-world applications—were shown to foster deeper interpretive comprehension, enhance motivation, and support students' moral awareness. These results affirm that hadith learning should move beyond memorization toward an interactive, experience-based model that allows students to actively construct meaning. In this way, the study responds to the researcher's concern that Islamic Education must be pedagogically renewed to remain meaningful and transformative for contemporary learners.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single school setting, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to different educational contexts. Teacher readiness and variation in pedagogical skills also influenced the quality of contextual implementation, suggesting that the effectiveness of the model may differ across educators. Future studies should involve larger and more diverse school samples, as well as examine the long-term impact of contextual learning on students' moral behavior outside the classroom. Further research might also explore the integration of digital tools with contextual learning, investigate teacher training models that strengthen pedagogical competence, or compare contextual learning with other innovative approaches such as problem-based learning or project-based learning in hadith instruction.

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