

Referential Adequacy and Structural Corroboration in Validation or Rejection of Women's Rights in Theological Discourse

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Abstract

This study uses content-analysis and book review format, but is not a book review, specifically as it focuses on women's rights in a religion and the controversies the issue generated in theological discourse. Considered here then are the scriptural subtexts on women's rights in Islam identified as misunderstood, misinterpreted and confused. Eleven women's rights themes are documented and content-analyzed as evidence confirming support for women's rights in Islam, refuting claims to the contrary. Referential adequacy, consensual validation and structural corroboration (Creswell, 1998) were adopted for validity and reliability in confirming or rejecting ascribed claims on women's rights in the context of the study. Scriptural themes on women's rights from the Qur'an are presented on a 6-point table. Data is allocated into samples, sorted in unit of observation and unit of analysis, with specifications under method leading to results interpretation by frequency rankings under Veracity Index. Among the conclusion is that women's rights in Islam is for all humanity, not just Muslims, since veracity of the scriptural subtexts sampled are validated for universal acceptance by the percentages of universality of appeal and practicability of the women's rights scriptural subtexts.

Keywords: women's rights, content-analysis, book review format, scriptural subtexts, referential adequacy, structural corroboration, consensual validation, universal appeal and practicability

Introduction

This study focuses on referential adequacy, structural corroboration and a format reminiscent of book review, for content-analysis of written communication for women's rights in theological discourse, but it is not a book review. A book is however the written communication on which referential adequacy and structural corroboration are applied, to refute inaccuracies identified in issues of women's rights in theological discourse raised by the late Turabi, writer of the book (1991). The issue is "Women in Islam and Muslim Society (Turabi: 1991)." Reference to "Women in Islam and Muslim Society (Turabi: 1991)" does not however mean this study is only for Muslim women or only for Muslims and the Muslim society. This study contributes to knowledge, for use by Christians, Muslims and everyone interested, notwithstanding the fact that it is rooted in theological perspectives.

Referential adequacy and structural corroboration, as Creswell (1998:197) explained, are qualitative research methods that can be used for data verification, research validity and credibility. According to Creswell, citing Eisner (1998:200), referential adequacy relies on the importance of criticism for consensual validation (to be achieved) by seeking opinions of other authorities or texts to confirm the accuracy or disprove the inaccuracy of the issue in contention. Creswell (1998:197) explained structural corroboration to be understood as a method used by citing and relaying multiple data to support or contradict the interpretations being contested. The usefulness of content-analyzing Turabi's book (1991) is in relaying major educative points of the theological discourse the author treated for benefit of Muslims and non-Muslims in general. Identifying, refuting and correcting inaccuracies in the book by referential adequacy and structural corroboration is also an important contribution to knowledge, in that proof cited are beneficial to comparative theology, and by that all mankind, not only Muslims.

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The formula evolved by using referential adequacy and structural corroboration for validation or rejection of written communication for theological discourse can then become adaptable for usage in similar intellectually-based, research-guided theological discourses, or even secular discourses.

Statement of the Problem

Today's world has been preoccupied with agenda on women, children and issues of women's rights and child rights. Societies are being encouraged to treat women and child rights as issues of human rights. The urgency of the situation have led to series of conventions at different forums in the United Nations, the Africa Union, the European Union, or even the Organization of Islamic Countries, the Vatican and other Christian Association bodies. Almost all women and child rights problems have been identified and solutions offered. Islam in particular, has elaborate explanations on both women and child rights.

The major problem however, has been foremost, the lack of implementation of the prescribed solutions, due to dearth of political will, cultural constraints or misinterpretations of religion, and often, male chauvinism. Ignorance and illiteracy are however also prevalent. This study uses referential adequacy and structural corroboration, explained in Creswell (1998:197), to identify and disprove inaccuracies in a written theological discourse as a contribution to the way forward, by relaying multiple textual data from consensus of authorities to contradict the interpretations being contested and support the formation of broader coalition of consensus for proactive engagement with women's rights at all levels of society.

Justification of the Study

This study is meant to motivate a process of critical self-appraisal, a re-focusing of attention inward to inquire, question, learn and proceed by tackling first, challenges of issues Turabi (1991) identified in the book (1991) under study, but which the author addressed with inaccuracies, and, secondly, motivate a process for tackling the other challenges of women's rights earlier identified in works by different entities. The driving force for this change and initiative for tackling it is a verse from the Qur'an, chapter 13 verses 11: "*Allah does not change the condition of a people, unless they first change that which is in their hearts.*"

Research Questions

The following questions are raised to guide the study:

1. What is to be content-analyzed?
2. What method and instruments are to be used for the content-analysis?
3. How are Referential Adequacy and Structural Corroboration used for the content in Theological Discourse analyzed?

Contextualizing Women's Rights in Theological Discourse

"Women in Islam and Muslim Society (Turabi, 1991)," is no doubt a stimulating, nostalgic piece of literature not only for Muslims, but also Christians and the Secular world. The book is important to women's rights campaign in general because women's rights denial or abuse is prevalent in both the secular world and among Muslims and Christians, as among all humans in all parts of the world. The book is therefore a reminder not only to Muslims to live up to the teachings of Islam on women's rights, but also a reminder to the whole world, of Islam's contributions to women's rights.

But there are confusing, inaccurate and ambiguous perspectives in the book (Turabi, 1991). Consider the following statement from the book (Turabi, 1991:5) for instance: "Male and female relatives may assume different stance over the religious options." Turabi (1991) was referring to the struggles of early Muslim converts to Islam in Makkah at the commencement of Prophet Muhammad's (*Sallallahu alaihi wasallam*) mission in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. At the beginning of Islam in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, matters pertaining decisions to remain a polytheist or reject idol worship after acceptance of Islam (what Turabi called the 'religious option' (1991:5), were not such a simple issue for male and female relatives to choose as casually as Turabi's statement (1991:5) infers. The contest between Islam and polytheism/idol-worship had caused catastrophic upheavals. Saudi Arabia was undergoing a revolution. The freedom "to assume different stance over the religious option," (Turabi, 1991:5) where Islam was the issue, was abrogated. It in fact, never existed until Muslims fought for it. There was, that time, simply no such option for the early Muslim converts. What prevailed was an either/or situation with all the underlying consequences.

Related to this is another assertion made to prove the extent of freedom for Muslim women: Turabi (1991:6) stated that “a Muslim woman might have a husband who was still an atheist.” This statement needs elaboration because it is a misleading example of the women's rights option Turabi (1991:6) meant to support in the context of the provisions he failed to fully explain in the instance he used for the time referred. That time was the beginning of Islam in Makkah, when Muslims were few, conversions were taken place and the Qur'an was being revealed. But even in those days, Muslim women understood the extent of the freedom options they had and knew that there was no reason or justification for a Muslim woman to marry an idol-worshipper or an atheist, or to remain within that marriage. The statement quoted in Turabi (1991:6) cannot therefore stand, because the fact was that none of the Muslim women so referred, after embracing Islam ever chose to remain married to their polytheist/idol-worshipping husbands, particularly after they migrated from Makkah to Madinah. Turabi's example (1991:7) with Umm-Saleem bin Mahan ironically proved this. He (1991:7) explained that she married Malik bin Al-Nadir before the advent of Islam, but as she was among the earliest converts to Islam, she exercised the women rights freedom option in that circumstance and rejected her husband who “went (later) to Syria to die,” (Turabi, 1991:7). Turabi's statement (1991:6) quoted above should therefore not be taken as the accepted limit of Muslim women rights option then for the early women converts to Islam in Makkah and Madinah, because all the women in such marriages Turabi (1991:7) cited, exercised their full women's rights by either separating from their polytheist/idol-worshipping husbands, or the husbands later accepted Islam.

In fact, the vogue was that Muslim women in those harsh, threatening, dangerous and oppressive times in Makkah at the advent of Islam used to exercise their freedom in how they invited their idol-worshipping husbands to Islam and made that a condition for continuation of the marriage or for a new marriage. Turabi (1991:9) proved this to be so in Turabi (1991:9), where he stated that “Umm Saleem was one such lady. She said to AbiTalha, who asked her hands in marriage: “By God, one like you cannot be rejected, but you are a polytheist and I am a Muslim woman. If you embrace Islam, I take that as my dowry from you,” (Turabi, 1991:9)

There is also in Turabi (1991:9) another inaccuracy that limited Muslim women's rights where Turabi (1991:9) stated that a Muslim woman “performs her acts of worship purely on the basis of her own intension.” Turabi's (1991:9) limiting of the Muslim woman's performance of worship on only the basis of her intension, is reductionist because it neglected the conviction of the woman, which is paramount, since it expresses her will, her individuality, her inner freedom and her resolve to accept or reject. Highlighted below are therefore the women's rights issues for theological discourse this study samples and for which referential adequacy and structural corroboration are used for validation or rejection of written communication on women's right for theological discourse: **1. Birth of a female, 2. Status, 3. Upbringing, 4. Education, 5. Clothing, 6. Protection from slander, 7. Mother, 8. Wife, 9. Rights, 10. RoleModel, 11. Inheritance**

Methodology

The Methodology for this study, drawn from research questions 1, 2 and 3, is a modification of Sobowole's (1989) 5-point Liker Scale content-analysis method based on the following: instruments, quantification technique, unit of analysis, unit of observation, sample and validity and reliability

For this study, **Instruments** are the table of contextual index, Qur'anic verses and hadith and book titles on women rights literature. **Quantification Techniques** is the veracity index. **Unit of Analysis** is the number of themes selected on women's rights issues attracting most attention. **Unit of Observation** is selected themes of discourse on women's rights. **Sample** is the woman's rights issues in context-analyzed. **Validity and Reliability** are based on Structural Corroboration, Consensual Validation and Referential Adequacy, as Creswell (1998:197) explained them.

Method of Data Presentation

The method of data presentation is a 6-point table. Data is allocated into samples, sorted in unit of observation and unit of analysis, with specifications under methods. Frequency rankings quantifies data under Veracity Index, while Validity and Reliability, based on Referential Adequacy, Consensual Validation and Structural Corroboration under Theological Verdict and Supporting Data for Consensual Validation, gave confirmations

Validation of sampled Women's Rights Themes for Written Communication in Theological Discourse

Below are sampled Muslim women's rights subtexts validated for written communication in theological discourse, using tabled 6-point scaling..

Table 1, Showing Context Presentation and Analysis of Sampled Women’s Rights Issues in Islam Validated for Written Communication and Theological Discourse, using Referential Adequacy and Structural Corroboration

Sample	Unit of Observation and unit of Analysis	Instruments:	Quantification Technique (ordinal values)	Validity and Reliability	
				Referential Adequacy	Structural Corroboration
Women’s rights issues in Context-analyzed	Method: Number of selected themes of discourse on women’s rights and the selected themes	1.Table 2.Qur’an and Hadith 3.Books	Veracity Index: Total cited unit frequencies and Sampled unit frequencies added together	Theological Verdict: (Rejection of injustice) & (Validation of women’s rights	Supporting Data 1. Consensual Validation 2.Sources: Qur’an, Hadith, Scholars
1. Birth of a female	1.Females as blessings (Qur’an: 42:49) 2.Special care for female children, (Hadith) 3.Rejection of hating birth of females and killing them (Qur’an:16:59, 14:17,81:8-9)	Qur’an Hadith	24	Frequencies of rejected attitudes per theme quoted in the Qur’an,16:59, 14:17,81:8-9: =4	1.Subtexts on women in Qur’an about=258 3. Subtexts on women in Hadith =500 2.What scholars published about women in Islam= 40 pages of bibliography out of 298 pages: (Offenhauer: 2005:5)
2.Status	1.Woman as daughter 2. Woman as wife. 3.Woman as role model 3. Woman as man’s equal 4.Woman as an person (Qur’an &Hadith)	Qur’an Hadith	24	Frequencies of Validations in the Qur’an per theme analyzed =4	
3.Upbringing	1.Kindness for female child 2. Ruling against abuse of the female child 3.Reward for upbringing of the female child (Hadith: Bukhari& Muslim)	1.Qur’an 2.Hadith	23	Frequencies of Validations in the Qur’an per theme analyzed =3	
4. Clothing	1.Decent clothing/dressing as obligation (Qur’an) 2.None display of adornment while abroad	1.Qur’an	21	Frequencies of Validations in the Qur’an per theme analyzed =2	
5.Education	Search for knowledge is mandatory for both male and female (Hadith)	1.Hadith	21	Frequencies of Validations in the Qur’an per theme analysed=1	
6.Marriage	1.wife (Qur’an: 30:21) 2. living in love and mercy 3. Treating wives with best conduct 4.Wives are garments for husbands and husbands are garments for them Qur’an:23:187)	1.Qur’an 2.Hadith	22	Frequencies of Validations in the Qur’an per theme analyzed =4	
7. Mother	1.Heaven is at mothers’ feet (Hadith) 2.Mothers given priority 3 times before fathers (Hadith) 4. Doing good to mothers, aunts, sisters, etc., as expiation of sin. Hadith	1.Hadith	20	Frequencies of Validations in the Qur’an per theme analyzed =4	
8.Role Model	1.Woman as mother (Hadith & Qur’an) 2. Woman as devotee 3. Woman as chaste (Hadith & Qur’an)	1.Qur’an 2.Hadith	23	Frequencies of Validations in the Qur’an per theme analyzed =3	
9. Equality	1.Men and women are created equal (Qur’an:33:55)	1.Qur’an	14	Frequencies of Validations in the Qur’an per theme analyzed =1	
10.Rights	1.Protection from slander 2.Women have rights over men, men have rights over women (Quran:2:228)	1.Qur’an	16	Frequencies of Validations in the Qur’an per theme analyzed =2	
11. Inheritance	1.Women inherit their relations: (Qur’an:4:7)	Qur’an	16	analyzed=3	
Total= 11	Total=30	Total =20	Total=187	Total=28	Total=798

Data in table above shows total number of sampled women's rights issues in contexts analyzed at 11, total of units of observation and units of analysis at 30, total cited unit frequencies and sampled unit frequencies at 20, total frequencies of validations in the Qur'an and Hadith per theme analyzed at 187, and total number of supporting data for structural corroboration and consensual validation in sources at 798. The table therefore is the formula developed in this study that can be used for validation or rejection of written communication on women's rights issues in theological discourse. Emphasis however is on the process rather than the numerical values of the procedures involved in the quantification. But as the total of 798 stands as the highest numerical value under total, validity and reliability for the acceptance or rejection of written communication on women's rights issues in theological discourse must therefore also be by referential adequacy and structural corroboration under the indices identified and used in the table

Below are quotations of the Qur'anic verses and hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) as used by Abdel Azeem (1995), Ahmad, (1976) and Kidwai (1978) as the verses are in the Qur'an and hadith books, and as the authors used them in their contributions to women rights in Islam. The quotations (from the Qur'an and Hadith, with this writer's emphasis and headings) are represented to explain and validate contents of the table and methodology for the content-analysis format used. The verses and hadith are represented in their Qur'anic and hadith contexts without interpretation or explanations because they are self-explanatory and therefore need no further commentaries.

1. **Birth of a female:** "...Allah creates what He wills. He bestows female children to whomever He wills and bestows male children to whomever He wills," (Qur'an: 42:49).
A hadith maintains also, that "whosoever has a daughter and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favour his son over her, God will enter him into Paradise." (IbnHanbal).
2. **Status:** "For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them all has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward." (Qur'an:33:35)
3. **Upbringing:** "He who is involved in upbringing of daughters and accords benevolent treatment towards them, they will be protection for him against hell fire." (Hadith: Bukhari and Muslim).
"Whoever maintains two girls till they attain maturity, he and I will come on resurrection Day like this; and he (Prophet Muhammad may peace be upon Him) joined his fingers" (Hadith: Muslim).
4. **Education:** "Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim, male and female," (Hadith, Al-Bayhaqi}
5. **Clothing:** "O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their bodies (when abroad) so that they should be known and not molested," (Qur'an, 33:59).
"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty...And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms" (Qur'an:24:30-31).
6. **Protection from slander:** "And those who launch a charge against chaste women, and produce not four witnesses (to support their allegations), flog them with eighty stripes; and reject their evidence ever after; for such men are wicked transgressors" (Qur'an:24:4)
7. **Mother:** A famous saying of the Prophet Muhammad is 'paradise is at the feet of mothers.'(in Al-Nisa'i, IbnMajah, IbnHanbal)
8. **Wife:** "And among His signs is this: that He created mates for you from yourself that you may find rest, peace of mind in them and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, herein indeed are signs for people who reflect" (Qur'an: 30:21)
9. **Rights:** "Whoever works righteously, man or woman, and has faith, verily, to him/her we will give a new life that is good and pure, and we will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions." (Qur'an:16:97)
10. **Role Model:** "And Allah sets forth, as example for those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh: Behold, she said: 'O my Lord, build for me , in nearness to you, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings and save me from those who do wrong.' And Mary the daughter of Imran who guarded her chastity and We breathed into her body of Our Spirit; and she testifies to the truth of the words of her Lord and His revelations and was one of the devout." (Qur'an:66:11-13)

11. **Inheritance:** “Man shall have a portion of what the parents and near relatives leave, and women shall have a portion of what the parents and near relatives leave, whether there is little or much of it—a legal share” (Qur’an:4:7)

Findings

Findings for this study are based on the research questions raised, for instance:

Research question 1, what is to be content-analyzed, has been answered, by identification of 11 items on women’s rights, which also became the sample for the content-analysis. Research question 2, what method and instruments are to be used for the content analysis, has also been answered, by identification of unit of observation and unit of analysis for the study. The units became operational by method used, which consisted of number of selected themes of discourse on women rights and the selected themes. The instruments of data analysis and quantification techniques were also identified and presented with explanation. Question 3, how Referential Adequacy and Structural Corroboration are used for the content in Theological Discourse analyzed, was validated with provisions for validity and reliability index for the content analysis, so as to prepare grounds for situating and explaining how referential adequacy and structural corroboration work on data for the study and how findings can be explained intelligibly. Finding for the study are the proof that Islam supports women’s rights, as shown in the Qur’anic verses and Hadith quoted.

Conclusion

It is the position of this study therefore, that results of the content of women’s rights issues analyzed and tested, have shown that Islam indeed supports women rights and gives clear instructions on how to achieve and protect those rights. This study has also shown that Islam is explicit on the most sensitive women rights issues women all over the world are generally facing challenges about. These issues are highlighted and explained and the Islamic positions on them clearly stated. As Abdel Azeem (1995) explained however, the behavior of individual Muslims and Muslim nations on women’s rights in practical, everyday life and in theological discourses that seems contrary to the prescribed ideal in the Qur’an and Hadith should not be mistaken for the Islamic position on women’s rights.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations:

1. That women’s rights should continue to be promoted with support from religious leaders and religious organizations
2. That common grounds of understanding and working together on developing women’s rights codes be established, so that support for women’s rights is also from religious perspectives.
3. That understanding and tolerance for agreed women’s rights issues for implementation should continue to be promoted by interfaith dialogue and interfaith mediation
4. That an out-of-court women’s rights dispute resolution body can be set up by interfaith body for mediation and resolution of controversial or hard-to-solve women’s rights issues.

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