



## Student's Perception and Experiences of Interpersonal Tolerance among School Children: A Qualitative Study

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**Abstract-** The primary aim of the present exploratory qualitative research was to explore student's perceptions and experiences of interpersonal tolerance among school children in Pakistan. A sample of ten (N=10) students including 6 boys and 4 girls was selected from government and private schools using the purposive sampling technique. A semi-structured interview was used as a tool to collect data from the participants. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis. Results were categorized into initial codes, four sub-themes, and the main theme. The four sub-themes were social tolerance, emotional tolerance, educational tolerance, and religious tolerance under the main theme of interpersonal tolerance among school children. The study of interpersonal among school children explored different factors of interpersonal tolerance among school children from a cultural and social perspective. The study of interpersonal tolerance can help to identify target areas for intervention and develop plans for the formation of interpersonal tolerance in school children.

**Keywords:** interpersonal tolerance, students, qualitative study, thematic analysis, school children

### I. INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal tolerance is an important aspect of the personality of children during the school years in every society. Interpersonal tolerance has been an area of concern for researchers over the years. Tolerance was operationally defined by different scholars according to their research questions and focus area of study. Tolerance is an important positive concept that deepens human relations, it has many cognitive accumulations reflected in the variety of trends and ideologies (Zrouwali, 2016). There are two approaches to understand tolerance, the first approach is related to prejudice and defines tolerance as a permissive attitude towards out-group, whereas the second approach is analytically distinct from prejudice and understands tolerance as a positive response to diversity itself. Based on the previous theoretical work, tolerance can be understood as a three-dimensional concept including acceptance for, respect for, and appreciation of difference (Hjerm et al., 2020).

Tolerance is a broader phenomenon and can be categorized into interpersonal and intergroup tolerance, it is believed by some researchers that both are psychologically distinct concepts and should be measured separately and researchers studied these two kinds of tolerance. Intergroup tolerance focuses on the individuals from a different group and interpersonal tolerance focuses on individuals with a different opinion. Interpersonal tolerance is the interaction between individuals with different values, preferences and opinions (kobayashi, 2010; Huff, 2018). Interpersonal tolerance is an ability to accept, understand, recognize and respect social, political and religious views of another person. Moreover cognitive, evaluative, emotional, motivational and behavioral aspects are manifested in a tolerant personality (Maksymova, 2019).

A number of studies have been carried out around the world to study the tolerance and related variables. Hameed et al. (2017) conducted a study to find the level of social tolerance in university students in Iraq. The sample consisted of 100 male and female university students, the result revealed that the students have a high level of social tolerance and there is no significant difference in social tolerance on the basis of gender. Majali and Alkhaaldi (2020) conducted a study in the United Arab Emirates and identified the values of tolerance in university students in relation to academic achievements and study variables, data was collected using a questionnaire from a sample of 200 university students. The results revealed that 83.5% tolerance in the students in different values and there was a positive correlation between different values of tolerance in students, moreover the tolerance level in females was higher than male students.

Wright (2012) studied tolerance in children and adolescents with divergent beliefs and explored the cognitive and affective domains including belief intensity and belief structure of moral conviction, it was found that both children and adolescents feel discomfort on divergent beliefs but discomfort is connected with moral conviction for divergent beliefs only in adolescents but not in children. Nazar et al., (2017) conducted a comparative study to explore the tolerance and other variables among students of three kinds

of educational institutions in Pakistan. The result showed that the students of madrasa faced religious intolerance.

Childhood and adolescent periods are very important in the life of an individual, children face many developmental changes along with societal and parental pressure. All these challenges make a child more vulnerable for developing various problems (Caspi, 2000). The problem of interpersonal problem becomes more urgent in the modern social and cultural context (Galina, 2013), The problem of interpersonal tolerance in children may lead to other mental health issues in children, consequently, these problems affect personal and social functioning of children and may result in social isolation and poor school performance (Galanaki et al., 2008; Lane et al., 2008).

Interpersonal tolerance is relevant with the education of children in schools. Children interact with different people in school and behave according to their personality and tolerance level. The interpersonal tolerance in children needs to be explored for their personality development and academic performance, the problem of tolerance in children may lead to emotional, behavioral and other serious psychological problems in later life. It is also important to explore and manage interpersonal problems at an early age to avoid future complications in children. School is an important platform to study children, school climate has been considered as an important factor in student's academic, social and emotional development, it is also a key factor in development of pro social behavior and support for democratic values (Cohen, 2014). School climate is related as a predictor in different student developmental outcomes like mental health, physical health, self concept and school retention (Thapa et al., 2013).

It is important to explore the phenomenon of inter personal tolerance and its different dimensions in collectivistic culture like Pakistan where behavior is affected by different social and cultural factors. Every society and culture has its own way of developing the concept of tolerance (Janmatt et al., 2018). This qualitative study is planned to get in depth information about student's perception, experiences and expressions of interpersonal tolerance among school children.

### **Objectives**

1. To explore the phenomenon of interpersonal tolerance among school children in cultural and social context of Pakistan
2. To explore student's perception, experiences, expressions and manifestation of interpersonal tolerance among school children.

### **Participants**

The study population consisted of students who were studying in different high schools. A sample was selected by using a convenient sampling technique from different government and private schools from the city of Sialkot. The sample consisted of 10 students including 6 boys and 4 girls' ages between 12 to 17 years studying in high schools. The students selected from the population having rich experience and information about interpersonal tolerance among school children.

## **II. MATERIAL AND PROCEDURE**

The phenomenon of interpersonal tolerance among school children was explored by using personal experiences, perception and expressions of the students. A semi-structured interview was used as a data collection tool in the current qualitative research. An interview guide was developed to get the data from participants. The questions were developed from the pilot study from the teachers, students and literature review about interpersonal tolerance. The interview guide consisted of demographic information about the participants and open-ended questions related to the phenomenon of interpersonal tolerance among school children. Students were informed about the nature and purpose of the study and informed consent was taken from the participants before the interviews. The duration of interviews was approximately 30 to 90 minutes, with an average of 60 minutes; the interviews were conducted in Urdu language to get in depth information from the participants. Each interview was tape recorded, and then all the interviews were transcribed into written form for data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the participant was analyzed by Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006); the transcribed data was interpreted by using an inductive approach to extract the emerging themes. The Thematic Analysis was formulated in different steps, the recorded data was transcribed fully in written form on the paper and read several times to get familiarity with the data, this helped to understand the overall trends and thought pattern in the data. In the next step, initial notes were taken to generate initial codes from the transcribed data, important and significant words or sentences were added to initial codes.

The sub themes were generated from the initial codes and these sub themes were further reviewed and checked against the transcript of interviews to determine the relevancy of sub themes with the research objectives. Finally, the names were given to the sub themes and theme according to focus of the study.

### III. RESULTS

The results were obtained after transcribing and coding the interviews, the results were divided into different categories of codes, then each category of similar codes were grouped under a sub themes and finally a main theme was emerged from these sub themes. The result revealed the main theme of interpersonal tolerance and following sub themes: social tolerance, emotional tolerance, academic tolerance and religious tolerance. The following table shows the main theme, sub themes and initial codes extracted from the data of the participant during data analysis.

**Table 1**  
*Initial Codes and Sub Themes of Interpersonal Tolerance*

Main theme	Sub theme	Initial codes
Interpersonal tolerance	Social tolerance	Company of peer groups Acceptance for different languages Understanding value of people Patience in playground Follow discipline in school Accepting caste differences Settling disputes personally Accepting age difference Accepting different attitude of children Sharing things with others Solving matters with the help of teachers
	Emotional tolerance	Patience while violation of rules by others Bearing punishment on violation of discipline patience during fighting Patience in abusive language Ignoring mischievousness Ignoring misbehave by others Apologizing from others accepting wins of others Avoiding aggression in sports
	Academic tolerance	Accepting grades Offer places to others in class Bearing corporal punishment in class Avoiding arguments with teachers New student acceptance Accepting high achievers Ignoring others cheating in exams Accepting teacher's criticism Accepting teacher's favoritism Nepotism by teachers
	Religious tolerance	Accepting religious ideology Avoiding religious matters Accepting religious differences Accepting different sects <u>Ignoring creed differences</u>

The following subsections explain the content of sub themes and provide relevant excerpts from the data obtained from the students.

## **Social Tolerance**

The first sub theme describes social tolerance in school children which shows social interaction of children with each other. This sub theme contains several initial codes including company of peer groups, understanding the value of people, patience in the playground, settling disputes personally and acceptance for different languages etc. School children explained their perception and personal experiences regarding social relationships among school children. The following excerpts highlight the experiences and manifestation of social tolerance among school children.

*"What I have seen myself mostly in this age is that those people who have more friends have more tolerance in them. However the person who wants to be alone cannot have tolerance with in him. Tolerance can exist only in the person who knows the value of people and it exists only in the student who can tolerate whatever other says or take mickey out of them. I have seen such boys around me who have a lot of mutual tolerance in them"*

*(Participant, 1 page 2 line 26-35)*

Another student explained his experience of social tolerance among children in a group.

*"The children who are around me like I am, we have a proper group. So, every child won't have same level of tolerance. So, there are some children in our group also who do many wrong things. They don't tolerate it on themselves though but when they need help, then we always help them. Like if they don't have money some day, so if they need it we will quickly provide them with it. We don't do such things that she misbehaved at that certain time so I won't help her now. In fact if we 5, 6, 7 children are collectively making a group so we all tolerate in it"*

*(Participant, 2 page 19 line 566-576)*

Many participants expressed their views about social interaction among school children in different situations; the children accept diversity and cooperate with each other in the school.

## **Emotional Tolerance**

Emotional tolerance was the emerging sub theme during the data analysis. The initial codes under this sub theme were patience while violation of rules by others, bearing punishment on violation of discipline, patience during fighting, patience in abusive language, and ignoring mischievousness etc. The following excerpt from the interview highlights the emotional control in school children.

*"They tolerate each other's behaviors that if somebody has done something bad or if they felt bad for what someone has said so, they don't start crying or arguing on minute things, they tolerate it. There are some jokes which we make only among friends that other person get hurts due to it, but even in this regard the girls tolerate it. They don't start crying over all this"*

*(Participant, 6 page 62 line 1824-1832)*

Number of students reported the capacity of the children to ignore minute things in different situations. The text below highlights the way children ignore what others say or talk about them in school.

*"Like ignore what he said. Don't talk to him, ignore him. Whatever he says ignore it, it's okay or even if when it's not your mistake so say sorry (apologize) because no one becomes smaller or greater for saying sorry"*

*(Participant, 5 page 51 line 1529-1534)*

The above experiences explain that the children tolerate thoughts and behaviors of others in different matters and situations. The school children control their emotions in different situations and tolerate different attitudes and actions by others in the school.

## **Academic Tolerance**

Students highlighted the acceptance and patience by school children during the academic process in the school. The initial codes related to the sub theme of academic tolerance were accepting grades, bearing corporal punishment in class, accepting teacher's criticism, accepting teacher's favoritism, nepotism by teachers etc. The participants expressed their experiences about tolerance among school children.

*"Often teachers do this that if there is any teacher's son in our class. So, they also study and in tests they get marks so they get more marks and even in papers they get more marks. They give them more marks but they don't give us more marks so there also children tolerate it and if we ask teachers so even then they don't give us more marks"*

*(Participant, 4 page 43 line 1284-1892)*

Many students reported their experiences and perception about the acceptance of other children irrespective of their position in the study, another student explains mutual tolerance of children in the classroom.

*“On the other hand if you compare children who have mutual tolerance in them, with those who does not have mutual tolerance in them. So, if they were not ahead of all but were lagging behind all, so they feel peaceful within them. They don’t bother about it that why they are not going ahead of all or why we are lagging behind all means, they will be happy in a place how much they will be happy going ahead or lagging behind means in educational matters in matters of study, they tolerate it. Those who tolerate stay happy and there is also peace in their life” (Participant, 1 page 4 line 95-106)*

The above experiences explained tolerance among school children during the process of education, mostly students shared their experiences about tolerance of school children during the process of education in the school environment.

### **Religious Tolerance**

Religious tolerance is related to acceptance of different children with diverse religious beliefs and background in the school. This sub theme was extracted from different codes like accepting religious ideology, accepting religious differences, avoiding religious matters, accepting different sects etc. All these codes explain children’s acceptance of people with different religious backgrounds which shows their tolerance towards children of different religions and sects, they also try to avoid religious matters and show respect to different children irrespective of their caste and creed. A student highlights acceptance of children with different religious backgrounds in the excerpt from the interview below.

*“There is a Christian boy in our class. Everyone tolerates it. In every aspect they tolerate it. They don’t say it to him that he doesn’t belong to our religion. We won’t sit with him or do this or that with him. They don’t do it. They make him play with them also. They make him study in group with them and all stay together with him”*

*(Participant, 7 page 70 line 2073-2079)*

Religious tolerance is an important factor in school children where students develop their attitudes towards people of different religions and sects, they learn to accept and tolerate different children with different religious beliefs.

## IV. DISCUSSION

This qualitative study based on student’s perception and experiences to generate themes and sub themes about interpersonal tolerance among school children. The study was conducted to understand the concept of interpersonal tolerance among school children from a student’s perspective. Semi structured interviews were conducted to gather information about the life experiences and perception of students in school. Students provided comprehensive information about the phenomenon of interpersonal tolerance among school children, they shared their experiences and spoke about their perception regarding expressions and manifestation of interpersonal tolerance among school children. Tolerance is a very broad, complex and multifaceted concept in the world community (Mather & Tranby, 2014; Tarocco, 2019). The concept of interpersonal tolerance was taken in a positive sense in the current study as a positive aspect of tolerance is emphasized in different studies of tolerance (Alhadiq & Wahyudin, 2020). The students presented the positive aspect of interpersonal tolerance and explained how children tolerate during interaction with each other in different situations. The findings revealed interpersonal tolerance under four sub themes including, social tolerance, emotional tolerance, academic tolerance and religious tolerance. This multi dimensional concept of interpersonal tolerance is consistent with previous literature which suggest that multiple expressions of tolerance are possible (Persell et al., 2001; Rapp, 2017), tolerance is a complex and multi disciplinary phenomenon which emerges as an interaction between different factors (Barlow & Durand, 2012).

Participants reported that social tolerance is an important factor in interpersonal tolerance, the children interact with each other in groups and learn socialization in school. The results are in line with findings that interpersonal relations are important in tolerance (Miklikowska, 2016). Emotional tolerance is another important aspect of interpersonal tolerance among children. The children tolerate in the cognitive and behavioral aspects, the findings highlight global trends of emotional tolerance as expressing emotions and feelings, respect and tolerance for diverse taste and customs are the most important elements in the structure of tolerance (Parfilova & Karimova, 2016). Academic tolerance in children is acceptance of different behaviors and attitudes of teachers and peers in the classroom and school. The academic tolerance in children is necessary for adjustment and academic achievements. Tolerance is commonly understood in terms of positive attitudes towards equal rights for different groups in educational settings (Green et al.,

2006). Religious tolerance is another aspect in children which shows their ability to accept other children with different religious backgrounds, the religious tolerance is the capability to recognize and respect the practices and beliefs of others different from one's own (Bakar, 2011).

Pakistan is a country where different familial, social and religious factors play an essential role in the attitudes and behaviors of people, interpersonal tolerance is also viewed in religious, social and cultural context. The findings suggest that the interpersonal tolerance in school children is relevant with the social, religious and cultural values of the country. The children show interpersonal tolerance in different situations according to their cultural and social values. Therefore, this study has implications for understanding the broader phenomenon of interpersonal tolerance in school children and developing strategies for tolerance formation in school children in social and cultural context.

## V. CONCLUSION

This research is an attempt to qualitatively explore the tolerance particularly interpersonal tolerance among school children. The data was collected directly from the students using interview technique to find in depth information about the interpersonal tolerance. The results revealed positive sense of interpersonal tolerance and different aspects like social, emotional, religious and academic tolerance among school children. The findings are important in understanding the complex phenomenon in cultural and social context and add knowledge to the existing literature on interpersonal tolerance. The findings provide evidence of different dimensions of interpersonal tolerance which provide new scope for future research in the area of interpersonal tolerance, it is required to develop scale for interpersonal tolerance, factors affecting tolerance and relationship with different demographics through qualitative and quantitative studies. It will also help to identify target areas for intervention and develop plans for the formation of interpersonal tolerance in school children.

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