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## Teacher's Perception of Tolerance among Secondary School Children: A Qualitative Study

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### Abstract

The primary aim of present study was to explore teacher's perception and experiences of interpersonal tolerance among school children. This was an exploratory qualitative research. The study population consisted of teachers who had experience of teaching at secondary level. A sample of ten (N=10) teachers from government and private schools were selected using a purposive sampling method. The data was collected by semi structured interviews from the participants. Thematic Analysis method was used to analyze the transcribed data. The results were classified into several initial codes, four sub themes and a main theme from the data. The main theme was related to interpersonal tolerance in school children under sub themes of social tolerance, emotional tolerance, academic tolerance and religious tolerance. Interpersonal tolerance in children is an area of concern due to its implications and practical significance. The study of interpersonal tolerance among children helped in understanding the different aspects of interpersonal tolerance among children in cultural and social context.

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

### Introduction

Interpersonal tolerance has been a topic of research in social sciences around the world over the last few decades, different researchers explored different dimensions of intergroup and interpersonal tolerance from religious to social issues. The world tolerance is commonly used in everyday life and people understand it in their social and cultural perspective, it is very difficult to find a single meaning of tolerance in the field of psychology and social research. The word tolerance is derived from the Latin word *tolerare* which refers to bear or sustain. It is the capacity to endure an individual or action that one finds intolerable (Laurson 2005; Mather & Tranby, 2014). The study of tolerance is a very important because of its scientific and practical importance. Tolerance refers to acceptance of things one disapproves of, disagree with or dislike, it promotes peaceful coexistence and avoids intergroup conflict (Van Doorn, 2014)

Tolerance is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon that can be categorized into intergroup and interpersonal tolerance. Intergroup tolerance is based on group perceptions of others, it has been considered as general positive feelings towards members of out-group, similarly interpersonal tolerance is the interaction of individuals with one another with diverse background, opinion and values. The study of interpersonal tolerance is useful because the members of the group do not have clear boundaries and interact with each other freely with in a group and it can be helpful in improving intergroup toleration (Kobayashi, 2010). Tolerance is full acceptance and valuing of others which means accepting and valuing the ideas, behaviors, and values of others. At the interpersonal level tolerance is respecting and considering the humanity of a person more important than any idea or ideal a person may hold (Williams & Jackson, 2015).

The study of interpersonal tolerance in children at school level is very important because different biological, psychological and social changes take place simultaneously during this period and adolescents face different challenges and deal with these changes for normal personality development. The development of a stable and coherent identity is an important task during this period and different components such as gender, sexual, moral, political, religious, and vocational are critical in developing a composed identity (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2003), when young people are unable to deal with these developmental challenges effectively, they are likely to confront the unhelpful psychological, emotional and behavioral consequences (Geldard et al., 2015). Consequently, these emotional and behavior problems negatively affect the academic achievements of children (Ahmad et al., 2007; Soomro & Clarbourn, 2012).



The period of adolescence is sensitive to the development of tolerance because the adolescents pass through different physical, cognitive and emotional changes and this is the time of most severe manifestation of intolerance, the main problem in the development of tolerance during this age is egocentrism. Ego centrism is a tendency to believe their way of life the only true, often leading to intolerance and aggression towards another way of life. Intolerance is a major problem for establishing multicultural justice and peaceful coexistence (Verkuyten et al., 2019).

Schools are very important context in the life of children and provide important opportunity to get academic and social success in the early years of life (Baker et al., 2008; Belfer, 2005). Children face different kind of challenges in educational institutions due to their changing roles. Schools are the best place to study the children because the children interact with different people and face different challenges in educational institutions. School and specially the classroom is a place where different children interact and different groups emerge which make school environment an important aspect related to tolerant attitudes and behaviors.

We don't have accurate comprehensive information regarding interpersonal tolerance among children in schools. Pakistan is a country with traditional collectivistic culture, where behavior is influenced by religious, social, familial and cultural values. Children are developing their beliefs and value system during the process of development and interpersonal tolerance help them to develop positive attitudes toward others and tolerant personality. Interpersonal tolerance in children and adolescents is a matter of concern in Pakistan and all over the world. In the modern social and cultural context the problem of interpersonal tolerance is becoming more and more urgent area of concern because interpersonal tolerance is an important personality characteristic and criterion required for professional development and maturity (Galina, 2013).

There are few exploratory researches on interpersonal tolerance among children in the country using qualitative approach, similarly very few researchers have focused to explore the interpersonal tolerance in cultural and social perspective. It is important to explore the phenomenon of interpersonal tolerance and its different dimensions in collectivistic culture like Pakistan because 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 the concept of interpersonal tolerance among school children. This can help to find the perceptions, experiences and expressions of the participants that describe the relationships and interactions of children at interpersonal level. Followings were the main objectives to

attain from the present study.

1. To explore the phenomenon of interpersonal tolerance among school children.
2. To explore perceptions, experiences, expressions of teachers about interpersonal tolerance among school children in cultural and social context of Pakistan

## **Method**

The qualitative study was exploratory in nature to explore the concept of interpersonal tolerance among school children.

### **Participants**

The study population consisted of teachers who had experience of teaching at secondary level in schools. A sample was selected by using convenient sampling technique from different government and private schools from the city of Sialkot. The sample consisted of 10 participants including 7 male and 3 female teachers having 3 to 20 years of teaching experience at secondary level in school. The participants were preferred from the population having rich experience and information about the interpersonal tolerance among school children.

### **Material**

The concept of interpersonal tolerance was understood by using the personal experiences, perceptions and understanding of the participants. Data collection is an important component of a qualitative research and interview was used as a data collection tool in the current study as interviews provide a deeper understanding of social phenomenon as compare to other quantitative methods like questionnaires (Silverman, 2000). A semi-structured interview guide was developed to obtain the data, the interview guide consisted of two parts, the initial portion contained demographic information about the participants and later part consisted of open-ended questions about the topic under study. The questions were developed on the basis of information gathered from the pilot study from the teachers, students and literature review regarding interpersonal tolerance. The expert opinion was taken from the research experts about the relevance and validity of interview questions. Special emphasis was given on



the wording, content, sequence, and approximate duration of the interview. Informed consent was taken from the participants before the interviews; they were informed about the purpose and nature of the study. The rapport was developed with the participants before asking the main questions by informing about research and asking demographic details, finally the open ended detail questions were asked in sequence to get in depth information about the phenomenon of interpersonal tolerance among school children. The duration of interviews was approximately 30 to 90 minutes, with an average of 60 minutes, the duration of each interview varied depending upon the information and cooperation of the participants. The interviews were conducted in Urdu language for the facilitation of the participants so they could express their ideas freely and easily. Interviews were audiotape recorded and special notes were taken during the interview. The recorded interviews were finally transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

### Data Analysis

The data collected from the participant by semi structure interviews was analyzed by Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), an inductive approach was employed to interpret data from a broad transcribed data to focus patterns and extract the emerging themes from the data. The Thematic Analysis was formulated into following steps: Data familiarization was done in the first step, the recorded data was transcribed fully in written form on the paper and read again and again to get familiarity with the data, this helped to get insight about the data and overall trends and thought pattern in the data. In second step, initial codes were generated from the initial notes taken from the transcribed data, important and noteworthy words or sentences were added to initial codes. The sub themes were generated from the initial codes and checked against the transcript of interviews to determine the relevancy of sub themes with the research objectives, in the final stage the names were given to the sub themes and theme which represented the focus of the study.

### Results

After transcribing and coding the interviews, the results were divided into codes, sub themes and a main theme. The codes were divided into different categories, each category of codes was grouped under a sub theme and a final 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 table below shows the main theme, sub themes and initial codes extracted from the data of the participant during data analysis. The following subsections explain the content of sub theme and provide excerpts from the data.

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

Main theme	Sub theme	Initial codes
	Social tolerance	Self-defense in groups
		Understanding other's problems
		Patience in playground
		Settling disputes personally
		Follow rules in school
		Sharing things with others
		Accepting age difference
		Accepting class difference
		Comparison with others
		Cooperation during poor behavior
	Emotional tolerance	Acceptance of modernism
		Accepting co education
		Positive way of thinking
		Control on theft and stealing things
		Patience in abusive language
		Silence during criticism
	Avoid extremism	
	Avoid aggression	
	Ignoring mischievousness	



Interpersonal tolerance

Staying in class

Accepting grades

Accepting low achievers

Accepting efficient students

Patience in study competition

Academic tolerance

Acceptance of homework

Reporting teachers about different issues

Following teacher's guidance

Accepting teacher's favoritism

Accepting teacher's appreciation for others

Accepting religious inclination

Religious family background

Respecting religious activities

Religious tolerance

Patience during religious conversations

Accepting religious differences

Accepting different sects

Following religious role model

**Social Tolerance**

The first sub theme describes social tolerance implying the tolerance in school children during social interaction with each other. The data contains several forms of social tolerance categorized into different initial codes including self-defense in groups, patience in playground, settling disputes personally and follow rules in school etc. The sub theme of social tolerance describes the tolerant and considerate behaviors of children in different social situations. Teachers viewed that students positively interact and cooperate with each other in different social situations; they follow the rules and settle their disputes mutually. The evidence of social tolerance in children is displayed in the following excerpt in which the participant describes the importance of socialization in children.

*"A few display mutual tolerance with each other for the sake of their own, who are their enemies, and for protection from them I also must have few friends. They make few friends so that if other wants to harm them so friends would protect them. Interpersonal tolerance is happening on this basis, neither any religious scholar nor their parents make them understand that they are a capable student or a small child."*

*(Participant, 3 page 12 line 317- 326)*

Many participants expressed the expression of social interaction in children; students in the class cooperate and share things with other children which describe the process of social interaction.

*"There is a child in the classroom who snatches anything from the others so if they tell him that it is alright no issue you can return it after using it, similarly children can also borrow book from one another or they borrow a copy or what some children from government school do this, they take out pages from their copy and share it with another that it is alright you don't have a copy so you can note your lecture on it. So in this way children can learn to tolerate such things of one another and can display it in really nice manner."*

*(Participant, 4 page 29 line 845-856)*

The aspect of social tolerance in children at school level is perceived and experienced by the teachers in a positive sense, the children learn to tolerate during the process of socialization along with academic achievements which help them in coexistence in the school as peaceful members of a community.

**Emotional Tolerance**

Emotional tolerance was the emerging sub theme during the data analysis. The initial codes under this sub theme were acceptance of modernism, accepting co-education, positive way of thinking, patience in abusive language, silence during criticism, avoid extremism, avoid aggression and ignoring mischievousness. The teachers explained the cognitive as well as affective aspects of emotional tolerance in school children, mostly students avoid aggression and extremism and control their emotions in different situations. The excerpt below from the interview exemplifies the emotional control and patience in children

*"So obviously, there are fights among children upon minute things, but then it is that they don't take to an extreme level. If there is an issue created in the class, so they just use someone to resolve the issue, like*



*they ask the teacher, instead of calling one another bad, they go to the teachers that he has commented us in this manner, and then you can make him understand. It's like instead of fighting there and then children act like this."*

*(Participant, 5 pages 42- 43 line 1250-1260)*

Number of participants reported about the capacity of school children to adjust in different situations. The text below highlights the way children solve their problems by themselves and avoid the unpleasant situations in the school.

*"A student was naturally like that he would tease everyone in a negative way, would say something like that. So, I have mostly observed that students were used to it that he would say such things, now others boys would listen and tolerate it, they would not take his conversation so seriously, they would tolerate because if it was exaggerated, it would become an enhanced fight and matter will go up to ma'am or would be transferred to the principal. In this way children cooperate with one another other and tolerate the thing which is said." (Participant, 8 page 83 line 2514-2523)*

The above examples demonstrate that the emotional tolerance is frequently observed in the school children. Most of the participants reported the emotional aspect of interpersonal tolerance, the school children tolerate and control their emotions in different situations in the school which is necessary for their personality development and academic achievements

### **Academic Tolerance**

Academic tolerance was another sub theme emerged from the initial codes extracted from the data. The initial codes under this sub theme were accepting low achievers, accepting efficient students, patience in study competition, acceptance of homework, accepting teacher's favoritism etc. Participants shared their experiences regarding tolerance in children in the classroom and school premises. In the following post a participant expressed his experience that how students help other children and highlighted the importance of tolerance in classroom situation.

*"If I have seen such students who are good learners, when they realize the teacher is repeating things for the third time, it is not because of us, infact he or she is doing this for children sitting behind who can't understand the things in first time, so then they also show such attitudes that even they didn't understand it, the motivate the child, if you did not understand it nor did us, we are trying to understand it together. So, this attitude is much reflected that if anything is being repeated twice or thrice, they understand that it is for those children who cannot grasp it. So, this is one thing which I have noticed more." (participant, 5 pages 44-45 line 1310-1325)*

Many participants reported about the individual difference in the class on the basis of academic achievements and children usually accept other children irrespective of their performance in the study. In the following post, another individual comments the acceptance of high achievers in the class.

*"If any sibling gets higher grades or any child in the class gets higher grades then they tolerate it as well. they understand that it is something quite natural, someone has to get high grades, and someone has to get low grades as well, so in this case I think they tolerate it, they don't take it too much seriously, obviously everybody feels like that, if he did not attain any position, they don't obsess over it, they do feel it but don't obsess over it." (participant, 7 page 70 line 2105-2116)*

The above encrypts highlighted the process of tolerance during the process of education, mostly participants emphasized that the children learn the process of tolerance during these years where personality development and education happened simultaneously in the school environment.

### **Religious Tolerance**

Religious tolerance was another emerging sub theme extracted from the codes like accepting religious inclination, religious family background, respecting religious activities, patience during religious conversations, accepting religious differences, accepting different sects etc. All these codes explain the aspect of religious tolerance in children, the way children respect different religions and sects and accept diversity in the school. The teachers describe the children thoughts and importance of acceptance of diverse people in the society as illustrated in the excerpt from the interview below.

*"We know that it is not necessary that all the children sitting in the class are Muslims, anyone can be Christian as well. Obviously there are minorities in our country so it can be. So don't be sarcastic about religion, we are here for learning so we don't have to bring religion in it, we all are studying same subjects, so we need to learn that, they don't, say to each other in this regard like You are like that so we would not talk to you, you are a Christian, you are a Hindu, all like that, we would not talk to them, we are here to learn, we are human beings and need to treat on another as a good person, and even in this regard the children tolerate each other a lot." (Participant, 5 page 41 line 1204-1223)*



Another aspect of religious tolerance in children was reflected in the data. The excerpt below conveys the way in which the participant provides the basis on which children tolerate and accept other children.

*"The students who have basic foundation attached to religion, or they know that this thing is part of our religion that if we tolerate it, it is to act upon teaching of our beloved prophet (PBUH). so, in this age children are still like they can adapt to everything and children who have information about it so, they keep in their minds as well meaning that if someone used some kind of abusive language or have said something else or have abused someone, a fight has took place but as we are so it is in our religion to tolerate, so if we put this postulate forward so then children do show tolerance."*

*(Participant, 8 page 84 line 2550-2562)*

Religious tolerance and acceptance of different sects are important aspect in children, they learn to accept and respect children belonging to different religious background. Religious tolerance has been an area of concern in different societies but children learn to respect different children despite the difference in caste, creed and socio economic status of the children.

## Discussion

This study was planned to explore teacher's perception and experiences and the analysis of data provided valuable insight about the phenomenon of interpersonal tolerance among school children. The findings revealed that the social tolerance is an important feature of interpersonal tolerance in school children, participants expressed their views about the process of social tolerance among children. The children support to other children and keep themselves engaged in different social activities in the school. This is also reported in the literature that the social tolerance is an important aspect in the children at different levels as social perspectives of tolerance, social norms and interpersonal relations have been found to affect tolerance (Miklikowska, 2016). The emotional tolerance is another emerging aspect which is considered a vital aspect in interpersonal tolerance in children. The findings are in line with the global trend of emotional tolerance which highlights the cognitive as well as behavioral aspect of emotional tolerance. Parfilova and Karimova (2016) analyzed the concept of tolerance among school children, they found that control in expressing emotions and feelings, respect and tolerance for diverse taste and customs are the most important elements in the structure of tolerance. Academic tolerance is related with the acceptance of different activities during the academic process in the school environment. The tolerance during the process of education indicates that children regard other children as accepted reality of their environment and culture. Tolerance is commonly understood in terms of positive attitudes towards equal rights for different groups in educational setting (Green et al., 2006). Findings in the current study also identified that religious tolerance is important aspect in children which help them to accept other children with different religious background, the religious tolerance is the capability to recognize and respect the practices and beliefs of others different from one's own (Bakar, 2011).

Tolerance has been studied in sociological perspective for many years but there has been an increase in psychological and other perspectives of tolerance over the last few years, it can be viewed that tolerance is a complex and multi disciplinary phenomenon which emerges as an interaction between different factors (Barlow & Durand, 2012). There are different concepts of tolerance in the world community (Maris, 2018; Tarocco, 2019), different concepts about tolerance in the world also affect its meaning. Tolerance is understood in positive as well negative sense in different communities (Rapp & Freitag, 2015). Pakistan is a country where social and religious factors play an important role in the attitude and behaviors of people and interpersonal tolerance is also viewed in religious perspective. Interpersonal tolerance is taken in positive sense in this study as it is considered more relevant in our context and education. It is consistent with literature on interpersonal tolerance in which positive aspect of interpersonal tolerance is emphasized in different studies particularly studying school children (Alhadiq & Wahyudin, 2020). The findings suggest that the interpersonal tolerance in school children is relevant with the social and cultural values of the country. The children show interpersonal tolerance in different situations according 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.

## Conclusion

The study was intended to explore the critical phenomenon of interpersonal tolerance, the participants provided useful in depth information about the phenomenon among school children. Qualitative data was gathered directly from the teachers and theme and sub themes were extracted from



the semi structured interview related to interpersonal tolerance in school children. The findings add to the existing literature on interpersonal tolerance by identifying the different aspects of interpersonal tolerance among children in schools. It will help the educationists and researchers to understand the phenomenon of interpersonal tolerance in cultural and social perspective. The current study is a good starting point in identifying the different aspects of interpersonal tolerance in children, further research is required to explore the level of interpersonal tolerance, factors affecting tolerance and relationship with different demographics through qualitative, quantitative and mix method approaches. This study urges the government and school administration to provide the support to children with problems in interpersonal tolerance. This will help in early diagnosis of tolerance problems, tolerance formation including counseling parents and education of school children.

### **Ethical Considerations**

**Conflict of interest** The author affirms no conflict of interest.

**Compliance with ethical guidelines** As the present study was related to children, all the ethical obligations were fulfilled and ethical standards were followed to comply with the institutional, national and international research standards.

**Informed Consent** All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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