

## Views of Middle Graders toward the Concept of Tolerance

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**ABSTRACT** The aim of this study was to determine the views of secondary school students on the concept of tolerance. For this purpose the researchers developed a 3-point Likert type Tolerance Scale (TS) with 26 items. The TS was administered as a questionnaire to 476 students from five secondary schools within Diyarbakir in the 2011-2012 academic year. Data was also analyzed in terms of grade level and gender variables. The results show that students consider the role of family to be important in the upbringing of tolerant people. They think that their parents value themselves and also indicate that they value other people's feelings and thoughts. They hold that the role of education, especially teachers, family, religious and social environment is important for raising tolerant people. The study provides further evidence that teachers can create good examples and assist the upbringing of tolerant people by applying democratic attitudes and behaviors in the classroom.

### INTRODUCTION

Developments in science, technology and faith, have led to the emergence of cultural differences in individuals' lifestyles. Many elements such as religious beliefs, style of dress, diet, home furnishings, programs they watch, and music they listen to, can be considered to contribute to the individuals' living culture. These elements also reflect the peoples' individual preferences. The existence of different cultural groups in a community is indicative of the cultural richness of society (Kucukbezirci 2013). The development of the mass media has, in particular, given widespread expression to different cultural groups has enabled them to get to know each other. However, the communication of cultural differences between people regarding their individual beliefs and lifestyles may lead to some problems. For example, some individuals may claim that their lifestyles are better and argue that the behaviors of others are incorrect. Under such circumstances, even the slightest differences between individuals can become a problem. This may lead people trying to avoid and not to communicate with people who do not think the same way as they do. This tendency may be accompanied by emotional violence that can also be referred to as marginalization among people (Kucukbezirci 2013). For this reason it is thought that a tolerant social outlook is necessary for individuals to cope with the potential negative effects of cultural differences.

Values are concerned with psychology as they are leading elements of individuals' behaviors, with sociology as they are social facts, and with anthropology as they can change from culture to culture (Kaymakcan 2010). Values have close relations with human's emotions, thoughts and behaviors (Buyukyildirim and Dilmac 2015).

Permanency of a society is achieved by the transfer of values, holds society together, from generation to generation. Human, as a social being, accommodate to his society by absorbing its values, attitudes and beliefs (Senturk and Aktas 2015). Values, which not only affect the cultures both also affected by cultures, contain the qualities of being good citizens (Cavus 2015). Values, contribute to group cohesiveness, an open climate, candid communications, helping relationships, performance feedback, the art of listening, trust, positive attitude toward one's co-workers, expression of emotions and sentiments, and growth of self-esteem (Sankar 2004). Hence, values education is becoming increasingly important at all levels of schooling (Taplin 2002).

In society, values change from culture to culture. Some of the universal values are freedom, justice, democracy, respect, loyalty, courage, diligence, tolerance and so on (as quoted by Yazar 2014 from Bahar 2009). Tolerance is among the most important values (Afdal 2006; Kolac 2010).

In most Western languages, the word "tolerance" has its root in the Latin "tolerare". In Turkish it can be translated as "to endure" and "to

tolerate” (Atasu 1995). Tolerance reflects the attitude of accepting that others may have different lifestyles and thinking (Ozdogan 1995). In a way, tolerance is a key to self-advocacy efforts and helps students move forward productively without condemning others or life (Warren and Hale 2016). According to the Crosstour, tolerance is to accept the existence of something unpopular or disapproved of (cited in Dagli 1995). Tolerance means accepting differences regardless of whether one considers them to be good, or not (Ture and Ersoy 2014). Dagli (1995) underlines that tolerance is not indifference or apathy. There is no doubt that tolerance is not an easily achievable virtue even though it may be superficially regarded as indifference.

Tolerance, which includes love, respect, confidence, acceptance, democracy, peace, harmony and freedom, is an important factor as it provides a healthy relationship between both individuals and societies (Kolac 2010). Tolerance for dissenting beliefs and conduct is considered to be essential to the sustenance of democratic societies. Tolerance is thought to be essential for the protection of individual autonomy and rights (Wainryb et al. 1998: 1541).

The importance of tolerance is increasing every day in a multicultural and globalized world (Bugar 2014). Mutual tolerance of different groups has contributed significantly to people’s socialization (Abdulkin et al. 2014) and peaceful coexistence (Dagli 1995).

Faith, family, school and environment play an important role in the formation of social tolerance. Tolerance can be acquired in the family, community and school that are within democratic rules (Ozdogan 1995).

People in the local community have a significant role in the formation of an individual’s personality. The family plays an important role in the development of an individual’s personality (Ozdogan 1995; Yazar 2014). Family members are undoubtedly the ones who best know the habits and characteristic of an individual (Basaran 1995). The relationship of parents with their child plays an important role in the formation of a child’s personality and self-perception. Parents are models for their children. The main reason for children and teenagers’ intolerance is that parents are intolerant of each other and their children and they reprimand them (Ozdogan 1995).

Like parents, teachers also have a vital role in the development of a child’s personality and

learning via perception. Children are with their teachers for six to seven hours a day (Ozdogan 1995). Teachers have an important role in helping one learn tolerance (Ture and Ersoy 2014), because tolerance is one of the most outstanding values among the teachers’ value tendency (Aktan and Kilic 2015). In order for teachers to approach students with love and tolerance, they must first know these concepts and fulfill these emotions. In contemporary education, teachers are encouraged not to pressure, scare or intimidate their students. Today’s educators are trained not to underestimate or ridicule their students and to be sensitive to their problems and joys. Modern teachers spend time on activities and guide their students in extra curricular areas. They respect the views of their students and do not insist on the correctness and acceptance of their opinion. They allow students to compare different ideas. They trust them and endeavor to reward their achievements. Such teachers know the vital necessity of tolerance, love, aesthetics, democracy and justice. Teachers are aware that teenagers who do not value themselves, despise their teachers and other individuals in the society, are filled with inferiority, anxious and prone to violence, are educated with the wrong approach (Munzur 1995).

Tolerance is a value that should be instilled in students throughout their education. A qualified education in tolerance is a necessary precondition for a society with tolerant individuals (Ture and Ersoy 2014). Although there is limited research related to the subject, Abdulkin et al. (2014) determined in a study that despite a high level of knowledge, the level of social tolerance in schools is very low. Based on the findings of the study, researchers claim that the possibility of conflict between student groups is high.

Tolerance acquisition at an early age is more effective. Secondary school education is regarded as a crucial stage of individuals’ education (Wainryb et al. 1998). Besides, Kaymakcan (2007) points out the importance of adopting virtues such as tolerance as well the importance of academic success. That is why tolerance was included in social studies curriculum as a value to be adopted by the students (Gomleksiz and Curo 2011).

Given the importance of tolerance to the function of a democratic society, educators need to identify ways in which they can help their students acquire a culture of tolerance influ-

enced by their family, school and the social environment, and to what extent these various settings influence this acquisition. Besides, it is needed to determine perceptions of students who have different sociocultural features toward tolerance periodically. In this research, the researchers are trying to uncover a deep connection between tolerance, family, education and the social environment. The determination of student perception of tolerance is therefore expected to contribute to work of teachers and curriculum specialists.

### **Aim**

This study sought to determine the perception of middle graders regarding the concept of tolerance. In line with this aim, answers to the following questions were sought with regards to the perceptions of middle graders to the concept of tolerance:

1. What are their perceptions?
2. In terms of the "gender" variable?
3. In terms of "class" variable is there a statistically significant difference?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Model**

A survey method was used to reflect the current situation (Balci 2004; Karasar 2009). This model describes a situation, which was in the past or still in present as it is. The persons or the events are described in their own situations (Karasar 2009).

### **Population and Sampling**

The population of the research comprises 476 students with 235 female students and 241 male students attending the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grades within the city of Diyarbakir in the 2011-2012 academic year. A sample selection was necessary as it was not possible to reach the entire population. Therefore, a simple random sampling technique was used. Participants were selected using random sampling, which considers the possibility of each sampling unit of the universe in the sample to be equal and independent, thus selection can be done freely (Balci 2004). Accordingly, the sample was randomly selected from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade students attending five secondary schools within the province of Diyarbakir.

### **Instrument**

At the onset of the study, prior to data collection, the researchers conducted a review of the literature regarding students' perception of the concept of tolerance. The researchers then consulted with a social studies teacher working in the provincial center of Diyarbakir who was asked for their opinions on the subject. In accordance with their opinions and recommendations a draft questionnaire consisting of a total of 49 questionnaire items was prepared. The draft scale then was submitted for evaluation to experts in the Department of Educational Sciences and Social Studies Department of Primary Education of Ziya Gokalp Faculty of Education of Dicle University. In light of their expert advice and corrections, the questionnaire was amended and prepared for pre-trial. The draft scale was named as the Tolerance Scale (TS).

The TS is a 3-point Likert type questionnaire with agree, partially agree and disagree as the options on the scale. Scale options were scored as follows for positive attitude items, that is, 3 for agree, 2 for partially agree and 1 for disagree, and for negative attitude items, 1 for agree, 2 for partially agree and 3 for disagree.

For calculations of validity and reliability, TS was applied to a total of 122 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade Cemil Ozgur Secondary School students within the city center of Diyarbakir. The data was first subjected to factor analysis, where by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was calculated to be .818 and the outcome of the Bartlett Sphericity test was 1011.908. According to Buyukozturk (2011), if the KMO is higher than .60 and the results of a Bartlett Sphericity test are reasonable then data is suitable for factor analysis. Also, according to Buyukozturk (2011), a component matrix of .45 or higher is a good scale for selection. However, in practice this limit can be reduced to .30 for a small number of items. Accordingly, after the analysis of component matrix, those items whose component matrix was .35 and higher were chosen for original application. A total of 26 items (20 positive and 6 negative) were accepted. The factor analysis process shows that the TS can be regarded as valid and reliable with all 26 items ranging between .357 and .819. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the sample is found to be .90. According to Ozdamar (1999), scales with a reliability coefficient of .60 and above are deemed highly reliable and scales with

reliability coefficient of .80 and above are considered to have a higher level of reliability. So it may be said that the scale is highly reliable.

### Collection and Analysis of Data

Questionnaires were distributed to students manually and collected by the same method. In the analysis of students' opinions regarding TS, arithmetic average and standard deviation are used. In the comparison of gender, independent t-test sample is used and in comparison of grades, a one-way ANOVA test is performed. In cases where difference is determined, the Scheffe test is used to establish between which groups the differences occur. The level of significance is accepted as .05.

In the interpretation of the arithmetic mean, the average value of between 1.00-1.66 equals to "disagree", the average value of between 1.67-2.33 equals to "partially agree" and the average value of between 2.34-3.00 equals to "agree". The intervals of these levels are obtained by dividing the number of options granted to the width of the series between the lowest value of 1 and the highest value of 3.

## FINDINGS

The findings obtained in this study are presented below according to the responses to the survey.

### Findings of Students Opinions about TS

Arithmetic average and standard deviation values of secondary school students' opinions regarding TS are shown in Table 1.

When Table 1 is examined, in the analysis of arithmetic mean and standard deviation of secondary 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade students' opinions on the concept of tolerance (max: 5, min: 1) it is understood that the questionnaire item, "It is not important for me whether my parents are tolerant of me" has the lowest arithmetic mean ( $\bar{X}=1.24$ ), thus students disagree with this statement while the questionnaire item, "Family has a great role in the upbringing of tolerant people" has the highest average ( $\bar{X}=2.79$ ) and students agree with this statement. In addition, the arithmetic average of the 26 questionnaire items in TS is 2.34 and that means that "they agree". Students say "they disagree" with the statements of, "I think family members are not tolerant of each

**Table 1: Arithmetic average and standard deviation results of secondary school students' perceptions about TS**

TS	$\bar{X}$	ss
1. I think family members are not tolerant of each other	1.28	.604
2. My family is not tolerant of me	1.25	.582
3. My mom values my opinions	2.68	.572
4. My dad values my opinions	2.62	.613
5. It is not important for me whether my parents are tolerant of me	1.24	.591
6. In a case I put myself in someone's shoes	2.29	.772
7. I am sensitive to what happens in my family and community	2.46	.720
8. I do not have a say in decisions given about my life by my family	1.57	.751
9. My parents have a say about my life not me	1.46	.730
10. I do not care about people's feeling and thoughts	2.49	.790
11. Thoughts and feeling of my friends are important for me	2.63	.645
12. School friends are tolerant to me	2.40	.679
13. Religious education has important role in the upbringing of tolerant people	2.68	.590
14. I think I am a tolerant people	2.68	.548
15. Education has a great role in the upbringing of tolerant people	2.74	.550
16. Teachers have a great role in the upbringing of tolerant people	2.59	.621
17. Influence of social environment is in the upbringing of tolerant people	2.60	.603
18. Family has a great role in the upbringing of tolerant people	2.79	.521
19. Different beliefs should be respected	2.58	.690
20. Acts of violence on TV reduce tolerance in society	2.46	.747
21. Different cultures and beliefs are richness for society	2.45	.733
22. I think the attitudes of my teacher in class are not democratic	2.22	.787
23. It is not right to tell people's fault to themselves	2.73	.581
24. I particularly pay attention not to break one's heart while talking	2.65	.617
25. I do not mock my friends	2.65	.629
26. I help anyone who needs help	2.61	.538

other", "My family is not tolerant of me", "I do not have a say in decisions given about my life by my family" and "My parents have a say about my life not me." Students say "they partially agree" with the questionnaire items of "In a case I put myself in someone's shoes" and "I think the attitudes of my teacher in class are not democratic." Students say "they agree" with the items, "My mom values my opinions," "My dad values my opinions," "Thoughts and feeling of my friends are important for me," "I am sensitive to what happens in my family and community," "I do not care about people's feelings and thoughts," "Thoughts and feeling of my friends are important for me," "School friends are tolerant to me," "Religious education has important role in the upbringing of tolerant people," "I think I'm a tolerant person", "Education has a great role in the upbringing of tolerant people," "Teachers have a great role in the upbringing of tolerant people," "Influence of social environment is in the upbringing of tolerant people," "different beliefs should be respected," "Acts of violence on TV reduce tolerance in society," "Different cultures and beliefs are richness for society," "It is not right to tell people's fault to themselves," "I particularly pay attention not to beak one's heart while talking," "I do not mock my friends" and "I help everyone who needs help".

#### In Terms of Gender Variable Findings of Students' Opinions about TS

The t-test results of students' opinions about TS in terms of gender variable are listed in Table 2. In the analysis of Table 2, it has been determined that there is a statistically significant difference in students' opinions about TS in terms

**Table 2: t-Test results of students' opinions about TS in terms of gender variable**

Gender	n	$\bar{X}$	ss	t	p
Male	235	2.37	0.186	3.059	.002*

of the gender variable [ $t_{(474)}=3.059$ , \* $p<.05$ ]. Considering the arithmetic averages of groups, the arithmetic average of male students' opinions about TS is  $\bar{X}=2.37$ , in other words, "I agree" and the arithmetic average of female students' opinions about TS is  $\bar{X}=2.31$ , in other words, "I partially agree." Thus, male students' opinions about TS are more positive than female ones.

Variance analysis results of students' opinions about TS in terms of "grade" variable are shown in Table 3. When the findings in Table 3 are evaluated, there is not a significant difference in students' opinions about TS in terms of the "grade" variable [ $F_{(2,473)}=0.743$ ,  $p>.05$ ]. Considering the arithmetic averages of groups, the arithmetic averages of 7<sup>th</sup> graders ( $\bar{X}=2.57$ ) and 8<sup>th</sup> graders ( $\bar{X}=2.34$ ) are equal to "I agree". The arithmetic averages of 6<sup>th</sup> graders is  $\bar{X}=2.33$ , and that equals to "I partially agree". Thus, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders' opinions about TS are more positive than 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

## DISCUSSION

Tolerance is not only a central value in education, but also it is a basic ideal in many spheres of society. Accusations of not being tolerant, of being intolerant, are serious and would in most instances damage the person's social and moral reputation (Afdal 2006). Therefore, society needs the ethical and civic values today more than ever before (Taplin 2002).

This study sought to determine the perceptions of middle graders about their conception of tolerance. According to the survey, secondary school students' perceptions of tolerance are high and support the findings of other contemporary surveys. According to Cavus' survey (2015), the tolerance level of secondary school students is high and in all dimensions of scale (value, acceptance and empathy) the level of tolerance of students satisfactory. Also, in a study undertaken by Cengelci et al. (2013), 70.7 percent students say "they agree" to the statement, "We learn to listen to each other with tol-

**Table 3: Variance analysis results of students' opinions about TS in terms of grade variable**

Grade	n	$\bar{X}$	ss	Variance source	Sum of squares	sd	Average of squares	F	p
6th Grade	163	2.33	0.193	Between Groups	0.063	2	0.031		
7th Grade	138	2.57	0.208	In Group	20.009	473	0.042	0.743	.476
8th Grade	175	2.34	0.215						
Overall	476	2.34	0.206	Total	20.072	475			

erance in school". In some studies, however, it is observed that the concept of tolerance is not covered in course books (Aktan and Padem 2013).

Families, schools, religious groups, television and peer groups are seen as the main tools for adding value to people. Aside from school, most students do not undertake formal education in values. In general family, religious groups, television and peer groups are front runners in the acquisition of values (As quoted by Izgar and Beyhan 2015 from Ryan and Lickona 1992; Halstead and Taylor 2000; Miklikowska 2016). In the present study, the role of family, environment, teachers and religion were found to have a strong influence on the upbringing of tolerant people. Studies by Yigittir (2012) and Unal (2011) also found that tolerance is one of the desired values that teachers want their students to gain.

For societies to have tolerant individuals depends on qualified value education (Ture and Ersoy 2014). The role of schools is very important in instilling in students a culture of tolerance (Wainryb et al. 1998; Afdal 2006; Cavus 2015; Tseng and Becker 2016). Apart from cognitive learning, students gain acquisitions concerning affective domain such as to be respectful, tolerant and helpful to others (Sankar 2004; Carr 2007; Cengelci et al. 2013). Therefore, there should be educational programs and teaching methods and techniques for tolerance in schools (Afdal 2006; Pike 2007; Abdulkin et al. 2014; Al Sadi and Basit 2016). Also, school management may have a positive impact on the formation of the culture of tolerance. If the school is governed by a democratic form of government that will support and empowers students' tolerance gained in the first stage of childhood (Basaran 1995).

In the present study male students agree with the TS more than female students. Accordingly, it is found that male students have developed a higher level of perception of tolerance than female students. In a similar research carried out on lecturers, it was found out that there exists no statistically significant difference between male and female participants (Kiroglu et al. 2012). The study also determined that students' tolerance levels do not vary in terms of their grade. In a study of Ural and Saglam (2011), the grades of students were also not seen to cause any difference in the democratic attitudes of students.

The concept of tolerance, regarded as one of these values, has a distinct significance es-

pecially for different cultures to live together (Kaymakcan 2007). The citizen who knows that tolerance of diversity is crucial to make democracy work possesses knowledge that is directly consequential for living together cooperatively in a pluralist society (Parker 2003). Besides, tolerant humans, groups and states are on the hand highly valued (Afdal 2006).

## CONCLUSION

In the study, students think that different beliefs should be respected, different cultures and beliefs are richness for society and acts of violence on the television reduce tolerance in society. The role of family, environment, teachers and religion were found to have a strong influence on the upbringing of tolerant people. Besides, male students agree with the TS more than female students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It should be given importance on the concept of tolerance in educational programs. The reading books, which will help students obtain the values included in the program and the other values supporting these values should be emphasized. Besides, it is suggested that educational environments should be organized by including tolerance. This paper studies tolerance in secondary schools within the framework of defined independent variables (gender and grade). In this regard, the study of tolerance both prior to and after secondary school would help have a wider understanding for the development of tolerance.

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