

Perception of students of teacher training programmes towards tolerance education



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the perceptions of prospective teachers about tolerance education. This research is a descriptive, qualitative study. A semi-structured and non-directive interview technique is used for collecting data. Research is carried out with 30 prospective teachers who attend Singhania University University Faculty of Education during the 2009 to 2010 academic years. Each participant is interviewed on the basis of their own will. Random sampling is used for this study. The results of the research reveal that prospective teachers are aware of the need for tolerance and tolerance education, both in society and within educational systems. In such, they make suggestions in parallel with this need. It is found that participants reveal views similar to those expressed within academic studies on the subject in their descriptions and suggestions regarding the need for tolerance in society and within the educational system.

Key words: Tolerance, tolerance education, prospective teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Differing attitudes and behaviors of individuals are as old as the history of mankind. It is not possible to say that every thought, approach, behavior and application that people exhibit within the scope of historical, social and cultural differences can be accepted by everyone. Thus, the desire for living together comes to the forefront in an environment based on democracy, human rights, tolerance, justice and solidarity, in which cultural differences are reflected to the life as affluence. It can be said that main elements for life awareness having those aspects are education and culture. Tolerance has an important effect on reflecting that awareness to a society. Respecting and understanding ideas, feelings and behaviors of those who are defined as 'other', and taking them for granted are the main aspects of social life. For these reasons, tolerance plays an important role in human life.

Like many other concepts, a comprehensive definition for tolerance can be elusive. The definition of tolerance varies according to differing cultures and perspectives.

1993: 376; Do an, 1995; Eyübo lu, 1995: 327). As another definition, tolerance is not diverting – or at least, to show maximum care not to divert – from convincing methods in expressing, discussing and, if required, practicing the ideas and applications (Yürü en, 1996: 32). According to the UNESCO, tolerance is to show respect for the 'others', that is to say, 'the different ones' right to be themselves and to avoid doing harm, knowing that doing harm to 'the others' means doing harm to everyone.

Tolerance is the condition of not being uncomfortable with others' existences with regard to different language, gender, religion, belief and attitude (Akarsu 1990: 96; Cevizli 1997: 338; Öner 1995: 15). Tolerance is to respect beliefs, ideas and traditions of the other people (Çubukçu, 1995: 115). Likewise, tolerance is to respect the rights of other people who have ideas and values that do not match with a person's own ideas and values (Kele , 1995: 73). Wilson (1991) defines tolerance as allowing different ideas to be expressed and as approaching other people within a universal scope, being independent of value differences.

When the definitions above are taken into consideration, tolerance does not mean indifference. Otherwise, there occurs irresponsibility and chaos. There should be a distinction between tolerance and notions such as apathy, setting free and giving permission. When it comes to tolerance, there should not be any discomfort, forbearance and tediousness, no matter what discipline it is, because according to Gürsoy (1991: 18), tolerance is in a human's heart. There are no such things as forbearance and forcing when a person does something within their heart. This notion does not cover meanings like being impatient, tedious, ignorant and lax. What one should not forget is that the basic elements of tolerance are love, respect, trust and understanding.

Tolerance gives life to the different societies in which we live. It makes societal diversity possible. For healthy communication, one should always give place for tolerance and reach for the wisdom to tolerate the other. It then becomes necessary to establish a functional communication process based on mutual love, respect, trust and understanding. Tolerance is a culture-related notion. Since culture is a lifestyle in its broader meaning, tolerance is also related to lifestyles (Çubukçu, 1995: 37). Taking different ideas, beliefs and attitudes for granted is closely related to the presence and development of tolerance culture in a society. Tolerance is deeply rooted in traditional Turkish culture. In such, Turkish culture has been a shelter for many civilizations in Anatolia for thousands of years. Having the tracks of a pluralist cultural structure, Turks have made tolerance a function of their lifestyles (Çubukçu, 1995: 77).

The national character of Turkish culture is loving people and giving people the value they deserve (Musao lu, 1995: 20). The reason why Turks have created a culture of tolerance is a combination of the atmosphere and the philosophers who emerged in that atmosphere (Büyükkaragöz and Kesici, 1998). Yunus Emre, Hacı Bektasi Veli and Mevlana are incomparable examples; we can see how important tolerance is in the sayings of these philosophers. Being keys for life, the words of these philosophers could be applied to life or made into a philosophy of life, and are the markers showing how tolerance culture has come from past to present. The saying of Yunus, "Love the created for the creator's sake," shows

how Turkish culture is open to tolerance. There is another saying of Yunus Emre: “The man who doesn't see the nations of the world as one is a rebel even if the pious claims he's holy.” Also, Mevlana's sayings, “Come, whatever you are...” and “In tolerance, be like sea” clearly shows how important tolerance is. Hacı Bektasi Veli carries the limit of tolerance to the unreachable points by saying, “Do not break anyone's heart and even if you get offended, don't offend” (Bal,2004).

TOLERANCE EDUCATION

Societies all over the world encounter various problems and apply different educational approaches for the solutions to intolerance. Societies try to solve the problem of intolerance, which is one primary concern to many societies, with tolerance education (Agius, 2003: 63). The relationship between tolerance and education is based on the following hypothesis: democratic values cannot be developed on their own and these values are to be learned (Jackman, 1978: 303). It is seen, however, that tolerance cannot be taught to individuals directly and they cannot gain this attitude automatically. As an educational goal, tolerance education results in limited tolerance acquisition (Godwin et al., 1998: 551). When the education process is evaluated, it is observed that although well-educated individuals learn democratic values, they cannot reflect them to their lives as thoroughly as they do to other disciplines. Education on democratic values, including tolerance, remains abstract and cannot be put into practice in real life (Jackman, 1978: 323). As a solution, it is revealed that there is a necessity for establishing a practice-based educational structure. Schools, which are defined as the arenas on which the society is built, are essentially laboratories for tolerance education. Thus, tolerance should be part of school life, both as educational and practice-based activities (Agius, 2003: 62).

The main purpose of tolerance education is to help students in developing strategies that will contribute to establish a world order that can provide social justice. For this reason, many

teacher education programs in many countries need multicultural education and training. Such lessons and subjects will help prospective teachers to understand notions like peace and tolerance better. Teacher education programs should include subjects such as global education, environmental education, gender education, and multicultural education. Giving this level of education on diverse subjects to prospective teachers will contribute to form a more tolerant world. Besides, students who have a tolerant education system are the students who acquire skills that can be applied to special processes like critical thinking, making decisions, interactivity, negotiation, solving conflicts, establishing a peaceful atmosphere, and protecting oneself and others from violence.

If we consider that people do not innately develop attitudes like being prejudice, intolerance, and disrespect towards the people or societies that are different from them in terms of religion, ethnicity etc., the role and importance of education in establishing tolerance culture can be understood better. In other words, intolerance is a learned behavior. The fact that intolerance is a learned behavior gives us a chance to consider turning these behaviors into tolerance via education. Intolerance stems from the assumption that one person's own group, own beliefs or own lifestyles is superior to others. At the heart of this is only rejection of value of the person as human. For this reason, the main purpose of tolerance education is to recognize human honor and the prestige of all mankind, and to respect them all. It is emphasized in training programs and social based lessons at our schools that one should be tolerant and respectful to others. Although the importance of tolerance is emphasized, the tendency toward violence is increasing within our schools, and problems arise in cultivating a culture of respectful people.

It is expected that in terms of detecting shortcomings and needs in tolerance education in education programs, necessary precautions should be taken; and thus, there is a need for increasing the quality of tolerance education. This study will contribute to this need. Further, this study aims to reveal the perceptions of prospective teachers about tolerance education.

METHODOLOGY

The present research is a quantitative study, which has a descriptive nature. Semi-structured and non-directive interviews were used for data collection, to comprehend the interview process for exploring experiences of researchers interviewed, according to the purpose of the study (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2004). That kind of interview mostly depends on open-ended questions. Besides, the greatest ease of the semi-structured interview technique for a researcher is that the interview presents more systematic and comparable information when it is executed according to interview protocol that has been prepared beforehand (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2004).

Participants

The research was carried out with 30 prospective teachers who attended Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University Faculty of Education during the 2009 to 2010 academic year. Each randomly selected prospective teachers was interviewed voluntarily. Semi-structured interview: Interviews were carried out with each of the participants individually in different times and in an environment in which they felt comfortable and were able to express what they think freely. Each interview was recorded to a recorder and ended in a single session within a twenty-minute period of time. During this semi-structured interview, data was audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were compared and double-checked. Then, the transcribed data were analyzed descriptively and thematic codes were formed. The main theme was determined according to the data and content analysis and sub-themes were formed. In content analysis, similar data was brought together according to concepts and themes and was interpreted and organized in an order that readers could understand (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2004).

The main theme and sub-themes, which researchers determined after descriptive and content analysis, were compared; the themes, on which there are “consensus” and “dissensus” are discussed and necessary arrangements are made. For reliability analysis, the reliability formula below, which was suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), is used:

$$\text{Reliability} = \text{Consensus} / (\text{Consensus} + \text{Dissensus})$$

As the result of the calculation, reliability of the research is found to be 83%. If reliability calculation is above 70%, this percentage is regarded as reliable for the research (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The result obtained here is considered reliable for the research.

After researchers determine main theme and sub-themes, the fact that more than one sub-theme can be formed by the answers prospective teachers gave to the questions is taken into consideration and sub-theme frequencies are determined. Frequency values of sub-themes are presented in tables in the findings section.

Data collection

Data were collected by using a semi-structured and non-directive interview technique. Of all interview types, the standardized open-ended interview was used, since it decreases the bias of the interview and it is effective in situations in which more than one interviewer is used (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2004). Interviews carried out with 17 classroom teachers were recorded with a recorder. Students were informed that they were being audio recorded. Each interview was approximately 20 min in length. For quotes, only what teachers wrote down to forms or said was used.

Researchers carried out the interviews in December 2009. For the research, 5 basic questions were asked to 3rd and 4th grade prospective teachers, 14 of whom attended the Department of classroom teaching, 6 of whom attended the Department of social studies, and 10 of whom attended the Department of science

Table 2. Opinions of prospective teachers about tolerance and tolerance education

Tolerance and tolerance education according to prospective teachers	f
Tolerance:	
Being unbiased	7
Being understanding and sensitive	6
Accepting without changing	5
Establishing empathy	4
Living together with people who have different opinions	4
Loving yourselves and others	2
A feature that should be reflected to every field of life	1
Making healthy decisions	1
A necessary feature for socializing and integrating with public	1
Basic principle that should be in human's life	1
Being open to novelties around	1
Not having an idea without having information	1
Tolerance education:	
Should last life long	7
Should be based on democracy	7
Is the most important content on which to focus in an educational atmosphere	5
Should start within family	5
Should target the attitudes of teacher towards student	3
Is the most effective element to reach the educational purpose	2
Is an investment for the future	2
Has an important part in transferring culture	1
Should be based on respect, sensitivity, and being unbiased to all people	1
It should be taught that people cannot be judged by their races, religions and languages	1
Is a conscientious responsibility that takes part in hidden curriculum	1

The questions were:

1. Please write down your opinions about tolerance and tolerance education.
2. Please write down your opinions about the need for tolerance education in Elementary Schools.
3. Please write down your opinions about which lessons in Elementary Schools should include tolerance education.
4. Please write down your opinions about activities that can be done to improve tolerance and tolerance education in Elementary Schools.
5. Please write down your dream school profile about tolerance education in Elementary Schools.

Data analysis

Descriptive analysis was used for examining data obtained in the study. In this approach, data and results are descriptively close to each other. Long quotes were taken from interviews and observation notes were described in a manner close to the original versions. Also, after reaching a sufficient data level, the researcher tried to elicit details in order to explain 'why' and 'how' questions. At this stage, an inductive analysis technique was used (Yıldırım and im eke, 2004). For this reason, all interviews were transcribed and main points were determined. Then, the data were coded and organized according to these main points. In the coding stage, male prospective teachers were shown as E1, E2, E3... and female ones were shown as K1, K2, K3...

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

In this section, findings obtained by prospective teachers' opinions about tolerance education are presented in a frequency table. Besides, direct quotations about opinions of prospective teachers are given.

Opinions of prospective teachers about tolerance and tolerance education

In Question One, prospective teachers were asked to express their opinions about tolerance and tolerance education. Table 2 shows the opinions of prospective teachers and distributions related to them. Furthermore, Table 2 reveals that prospective teachers generally associate tolerance with the notions of prejudice, understanding, sensitivity, acceptance, empathy and living together. When explanations of the participants are checked, it was found that they expressed a notion of tolerance as "approaching people without prejudice," "being sympathetic and sensitive

Table 3. Opinions of prospective teachers about the need for tolerance education in elementary schools

Yes, it is necessary	29
Stated reasons:	
To establish social peace and welfare	9
To create an understanding and respectful classroom atmosphere, members of which love each other	5
To catch up with developed countries	4
To give importance and necessary value to differences	3
To provide harmony between students	3
For the fact that human character is formed at younger ages	2
To solve disputes	2
To avoid jealousy caused by an competitive examination system	1
No, it is not necessary	1
Stated reasons:	
This kind of lesson is needed only in teacher training programs	1

sensitive towards people,” “accepting people as they are,” “developing empathy by identifying themselves with the other people’s emotional world,” “living together with people who think differently from themselves,” and “loving themselves and other people.”

When it comes to the opinions about tolerance education in Table 2, we see that opinions that tolerance “should last life long,” “should be based on democracy,” “is the most important content on which to focus in an educational atmosphere,” “should start within family,” “is an investment for the future,” and “should take part in hidden curriculum” become prominent. Also, it is expressed that “people cannot be judged by their race, religion and language,” “it should aim behaviors of teachers towards students,” and “tolerance is necessary to show the value given to humans.” The following are opinions of prospective teacher K-11:

“Tolerance is a notion that people behave moderately without prejudging the behaviors, events, and lifestyles around them. Tolerance is people behaving in a way in which they try to understand what other people feel and why they behave and believe that way. This is why tolerance education is important. It is necessary. If a person has a one-dimensional view about people around him or her, their feelings and events, then it is obvious that this person is no good for society. Tolerance is also important to protect our culture. It has an investment value for the future to protect social structure. It is important for achieving societal unity.”

Prospective teacher K-5 stated her opinions on the same issue, as follows:

“I think that no one respects anyone in these times where everyone struggles to survive. Everyone behaves for his/her own good and tries to make other people adapt to his/her life style. However, what really matters is being able to live together with people who have different opinions. In my opinion, tolerance education isn’t just learned with lessons but also through the attitude of the teacher during lessons and within a process”.

Opinions of prospective teachers about the need for tolerance education in elementary schools

In Question 2, prospective teachers were asked to express their opinions about the need for tolerance education in elementary schools. When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that most of the prospective teachers stated that there is a need for tolerance education in elementary schools. It is also seen that they highlighted the roles of education in “building social peace,” “creating an understanding and respectful classroom atmosphere, members of which love each other,” “giving importance and necessary value to the differences,” and “solving disputes” with regard to the reason of this need. On the other hand, one of the participants stated that this kind of lesson should be part of a teachers training program, not in elementary schools. This person explained as the reason of this opinion that “tolerance is a behavior that should firstly be displayed by teachers” in a school atmosphere. Below is the opinion of K-7 prospective teacher:

“Tolerance education is necessary in elementary schools, because the earlier education starts, the earlier it settles and strengthens. Also, if students learn to behave tolerantly in their younger ages, this learning will be effective in their later ages. When children learn tolerance in those ages, this will help them to improve their social relations and will develop into an attitude that lasts for a lifetime.”

Likewise, K-1 prospective teacher expressed her opinion about the need for tolerance education in elementary school in the following way:

“In my opinion, tolerance education is very necessary in elementary schools, because children may have come from different races and different cultures. To make them integrate fully and to make them understand that individual differences between them are actually different and a broad scope, relating thoughts is important to multiply respect between them.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From all opinions, generally, it is recognized that tolerance perceptions of prospective teachers are shaped within the frame of “living together in harmony,” “respecting each other,” “developing empathy,” and “acting in direction of democratic conscious.” The opinions that tolerance education must last a lifetime and that this education can be made possible only if teachers become role models comes into prominence. The analysis of prospective teachers opinions about tolerance education revealed that they associate this notion with the consciousness of living together in harmony with other people without prejudice and within a frame of understanding and sensitivity. Kouchok (2007) gives prominence to understanding, sensitivity and consciousness of living together in his definition of tolerance, while stating that prejudice is opposite of tolerance in many aspects.

As for studies about prejudice, it is seen that behaving in the manner of having preconceived opinions is explained with intolerance (Deaux and Wrightsman 1984; Goldstein 1980; Gürses 2005). In the study titled “Views of University Students on Tolerance” carried out by Gürkan (2005: 70), it is observed that 64% of participants perceived tolerance as “respecting others' opinions.” These notions, which can be evaluated with a specific reason-result relationship, are seen parallel to each other. Thus, one can say that this relationship is effective in shaping

opinions of prospective teachers about tolerance within the frame of having no prejudice to any person and appealing to them in an understanding and sensitive manner. As for the opinions of prospective teachers about tolerance education, it is seen that they generally focus on the mainstay of tolerance education, the process in which it should be maintained, its importance, and where it should start. Ba aran (2005: 52 to 54) states in his work titled “Tolerance and Education” that tolerance can be acquired only in a family and school atmosphere that is governed democratically and high- lights the requirement of continuing to strengthening this behavior for a life-time. Likewise, in his similar view, Ferar (1976: 65) points out in his “The Dimensions of Tolerance” work that tolerance education should start in family and continue for a life-time.

When literature about tolerance education is searched, it is seen that the issues like how tolerance education process should be realized, its importance and mainstay are main subjects, in the same way as in the case of prospect teachers (Munzur, 2005; Gürkan, 2005; im ek, 2005; Dönmez and Cömert, 2007; Kouchok, 2008). Thus it can be concluded that prospect teachers, both as a member of the society and as educators of the future, detected the requirements and problems of tolerance education correctly. As for opinions of prospective teachers about tolerance education in elementary schools, it is seen that almost all participants expressed that there must be tolerance education in elementary schools. As seen in the UNESCO report of Jacques Dolers (2006), education of values, specifically tolerance education, is a big requirement for living together in the globalized world (as cited in Kouchok, 2008: 403). Thus, it gains importance for prospective teachers who are the future educators to be aware of this requirement.

“...in our belief, culture and everything, we put forward a sense of humanity that covers not only our people but also whole humanity. Today this is the most needed thing in the world.”

As for opinions of prospective teachers about which lessons in elementary schools should include tolerance education, it is seen that almost half of prospective teachers state that all

lessons should include activities related to tolerance education. These results can also be significant since they reflect the importance participants give to the need for tolerance education. Main lessons in which tolerance education should be given according to participants are Science of life, Turkish and Social studies. As for the reason for these choices, it can be said that these lessons are lessons that play a dominant role in values education. As for the opinions that regard sub-dimensions of tolerance education content, it is seen that prospective teachers mostly think that teachers should be role models. In his work, "Tolerance as a Principle in Education of the Prophet", Yılmaz (2004) dwells on the importance of being a role model and setting an example in acquiring tolerance. What is as important as teaching values in value education is those values being applied by the educator. Kouchok (2008: 405) states that negative examples that individuals observed in their neighborhood in the "Local social level" stage encourage intolerance, while listing socio-political factors that affect tolerance perception. Thus, it is important to be a role model and set an example in order to give a qualified tolerance education.

As for opinions of prospective teachers about activities that can be done for improving tolerance and tolerance education in elementary schools, it is seen that "becoming a role model is possible through a tolerant teacher-student-parent relationship" came into prominence. The fact that opinions about being a role model and setting an example are also important here and can be considered as the result of the importance the participants give to the subject. As for the other opinions of participants, it seems that mostly practice-based activities such as "giving teachers in-service education," "having students do drama activities," "having students read books and stories about the subject," "preparing portfolio files about tolerance development of students," and "having students do theater activities" come into prominence, rather than theory-based activities. Schwöbel (2002) argues that establishing a tolerance atmosphere in democratic societies depends on individuals practicing tolerance and this practice is only possible through institutions that build tolerance identity (as cited in Schweitzer, 2007: 171). So, tolerance is a value that can be acquired by practice, rather than theory. Thus, it can be said that prospective teachers are aware of this dimension of tolerance education and make suggestions accordingly.

Finally, as for opinions of prospective teachers about their dream school profile with regard to

tolerance education, it is seen that more than half of the participants describe their dream school atmosphere as a “democratic atmosphere.” As for other opinions, descriptions like “where all students feel themselves precious,” “where everyone express their opinions freely,” “where teachers respect students regardless of their religions, languages, races” came into prominence. It is possible to gather all opinions that come into prominence under the title of “democracy and human rights.” It can be said that prospective teachers think that it is possible to execute democracy and human rights fully and properly only in a tolerant atmosphere that will emerge as the result of a qualified tolerance education. For social agreement, mutual love and respect, it is important to give students “human rights and democracy lessons” intensely, especially in primary education (Üste, 2007: 296). As for studies related to human rights and democracy education, it is seen that those studies focus on mutual understanding, sensitivity and tolerance notions (Akalın, 1998; Aydın, 2000; Kıncal, 2004). Given the fact that prospective teachers give importance to these dimensions in their dream school profiles, one can say that deficiencies in the current education system play a role in that.

As a result, it can be said that prospective teachers are aware of the need for tolerance and tolerance education within society and the educational system and make suggestions according to this need. It is detected in their descriptions of the need for tolerance in society and within the education system, and in their suggestions, that participants put forward similar views as those presented in academic studies on the subject. Thus, one can say that the awareness level of prospective teachers about the need for tolerance education in elementary schools is high; however, values education, including tolerance education, love education, and peace education must be included in the curriculum in colleges of education. These lessons should be included in the curriculum with regard to increasing awareness of prospective teachers and to demonstrating how related values can be dealt with pedagogically.

Besides, tolerance awareness of students must be improved with activities directed towards tolerance education, beginning at the first grades of elementary schools. As a result of this, Turkish society, which has historically reflected the richness of difference, will bring up people who have developed “living together skills.” Turkish society will not only strengthen its social

peace and welfare but also will have the opportunity to display its legacy of tolerance that was inherited from their ancestors.

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