

The Perspective of Tolerance in the Context of Youth Civic Attitude

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Abstract

Ability to influence destiny, social and civic competence, sense of duty, tolerance, altruism and empathy are important qualities of a personality. These qualities are developed in family and at pedagogical process. The publication describes the importance of tolerance in the context of global development, significance and topicality of civic education in the pedagogical context and pedagogical values in the process of promoting the dimension of tolerance of young people. The aim of the publication is basing on the updating theoretical findings that characterize the dimension of tolerance, to carry out the questionnaire and determine students' self-esteem of tolerance, as well as awareness of young people and attitudes towards equal opportunities in comparison with different ethnic groups. Summarizing the findings of the study, it can be concluded that tolerance of the youth is an essential component in the process of acquiring civic education, which ensures respectful attitude and a civic position.

Keywords: civic education, civic position, tolerance, youth.

Introduction

With increasing threat of terrorism and its diverse manifestations in the world, issues of social security and human unity are becoming more topical. Integration of society means the mutual recognition and acceptance of different groups and individuals, understanding and cooperation for ensuring common unity, security, stability and growth. Today, the future of each individual and personal well-being are to a large extent linked to the functioning of social and political systems of the countries. Living in a multifaceted and versatile, but at the same time built on the democratic basis European space, as well as being aware of the challenges of intercultural conflict in the era of globalization (Huntington, 1996), a young generation must be prepared to accept diversity and to be respectful and tolerant. Tolerance is an essential aspect of the formation of a new citizen's personality, and one of the most influential factors determining his/her civic position and its manifestations.

The beginnings of the formation of tolerance are found in the system of interrelationships in the family, where the particular example of parents and their behavioral models play an important role. Being aware of the complex socioeconomic situation in the country, it can be observed in practice that communication of some parents and children is insufficient to provide and promote a positive understanding of social interaction, which creates a favorable soil for the development of negative qualities, mutual indifference and intolerance, stereotypes and hostility, as well as uncontrolled manifestations of aggressiveness. As the school is largely responsible for the formation of future citizens, it seeks to offset the shortcomings of family upbringing. It is definitely important for the young people's successful integration into society and the realization of their goals of life that are closely linked to the opportunities for education and the formation of a targeted civic position. The school's institutional norms, social structures, school culture and values based on tolerance are a good basis for promoting intercultural education, which ensures that the ideals of constructive social interactions are emphasized and implemented in action. In order for the society to become more open to change and overcoming problems, the level of civic education of the society must be high, which can be characterized by one of the essential components of the quality of social interaction - tolerance in active social co-responsibility and participation.

The aim of the research is: basing on the updating theoretical findings that characterize the dimension of tolerance, to carry out the questionnaire and determine students' ((grade 9-12) of Liepāja (Latvia)) self-esteem of tolerance, as well as awareness of young people and attitudes towards equal opportunities in comparison with different ethnic groups.

The object of the research is: the implementation of civic education in the pedagogical process in secondary school.

The subject of the research is: self-esteem of 9th - 12th grade students.

Research methodology and sample characteristics

In order to describe the manifestation of civic position of 9th - 12th grade students in the dimension of tolerance, a survey was carried out. The questionnaire included issues that highlight the research of the dimension of tolerance in the following criteria: (I) diversity of opinions (II) religious tolerance; (III) ethnic tolerance; (IV) the attitude of young people towards equal opportunities of different ethnic groups.

The research sample consists of 825 respondents, 9th – 12th grade students that is 38.35% of the total number of students in Liepaja (total number of students in the 9th – 12th grade group: 2151 students), which ensures the reliability and validity of the study. Research data gain confirmation ability (Lincoln, Guba, 1985) and the results of the study are valid because it demonstrates accuracy. The survey was carried out between November 2016 and February 2017 in all comprehensive schools of Liepaja. The average age of respondents is 16 years, including 18 students (2.18%) at the age of 14; 258 students (31.27%) at the age of 15; 206 students (24.97%) at the age of 16, 179 students (21.70%) at the age of 17; 124 students (15.03%) at the age of 18 years; 13 students (1.58%) at the age of 19 and 27 students (3.27%) at the age of 20. The characteristics of respondents' age and gender are described in Figure No.1.

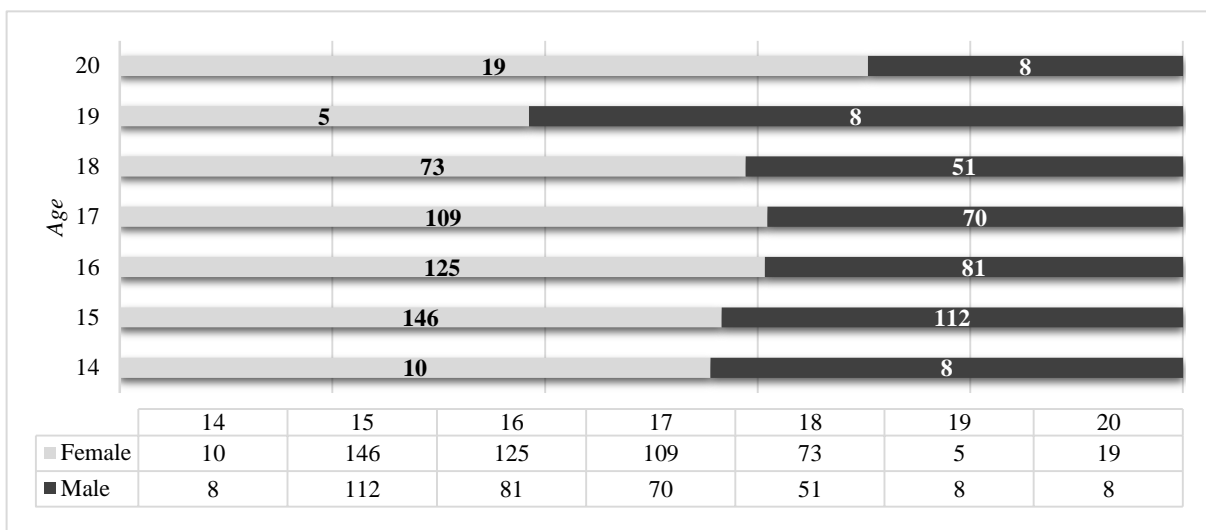


Figure 1. Respondents' characteristics: gender and age (n=825)

1. The Dimension of tolerance: Theoretical Review

Tolerance, as respect for diversity in society, promotes peaceful coexistence between different ethnic groups, ensuring their self-realization. The researchers of tolerance theory emphasize that an individual is tolerant if he/she has a certain value system that is formed by various factors (family, socialization, socio-economic situation, and government policies) (Cotneo, Jeane, 2009). Tolerance is the ability to co-operate, to accept opposite values. It reflects to human experience, culture, temperament. People can vary greatly in their tolerance, taking into account the individual's upbringing in the family, his experience, the existing cultural environment and cultural traditions. In addition, the borderline between what is tolerant and what is tolerable in Europe is becoming increasingly fragile, marked on this background by the so-called "new liberal intolerance" that can lead to "national intolerance" (Dobbernack, Modood, Triandafyllidou, 2013).

It should be noted the idea of researcher Raphael Cohen-Almagor: "Nowadays tolerance is one of the underpinning foundations of liberal democracy, and the practice of tolerance is perceived to be in the core of moral life. Tolerance has been described as a claim of our conscience, part of our conception of justice, a virtue acknowledged of being the distinction of the best people and the best societies. Tolerance has been perceived as a good in itself, not as a mere pragmatic device or prudential expedient. It is assumed that tolerance had to prevail to make living together possible. As no society is homogeneous, having diverse national religious and/or cultural conceptions of the good, living together requires tolerance toward plurality of ideas and ways of life. Tolerance is essential for finding a modus vivendi and common denominator to establish a society with a shared system of beliefs, a community of citizens who respect pluralism, diversity, and difference." (Cohen-Almagor, 2016).

In the multicultural society, tolerance is an essential precondition for intercultural cooperation and peacekeeping. The research carried out by European Commission in 2015 (*Special Eurobarometer 437 – Discrimination in the EU in 2015*) highlights that two out of three Europeans have friends with different religions or beliefs (73% of respondents) (total number of respondents 27,718), but three out of five Europeans have friends with different ethnic origins (67% of respondents). The most widespread forms of discrimination in the European Union are ethnic origin - 64%, sexual orientation - 58%, and attitudes towards transgendered persons - 56% (European Commission, 2015).

In the process of tolerance formation, personal development is promoted and person's emotional intelligence is developed. It must be admitted that individual tolerance criteria that promote active civic position and individual's psychological readiness to be tolerant and create positive interactions when a person comes into contact with the different, are different: (I) stability of personality; (II) empathy - an adequate understanding of what is happening in the inner world of another person; (III) thinking divergence - the ability to deal with common tasks in an unusual way; (IV) elasticity of behavioral patterns - the ability to change the tactics depending on the situation; (V) social activity - an individual activity for building constructive relationships in society (Osis, Ose, 2006).

The acquisition of civic education at school boosts social capital (Heggart, 2015), promotes capacity of democracy (Martens, Gainous, 2012), promotes collective action (Kanter, Schneider, 2013) and the preparedness of schoolchildren for multicultural democracy (Macedo, 2003), creating tolerant student attitudes in the existing pluralism (Wolf, Macedo, 2004) and understanding of democratic values (Kuran, 2014). In a complex and multi-faceted pedagogical process, the implementation of civic education cannot be disconnected from the existing changing reality and the content of the common education: "the process of learning has to work with the realities, then it will be possible to educate people to be people" (Šteiners, 2007, p. 42). As the educator D. Prets stresses, "education is not the process of filling the vacuum or correcting the deficiencies, but providing the conditions in which the opportunities included in a person develop in their entirety. Learning, on the other hand, is a moral achievement when a person chooses altruism instead of self-interest, reconciliation rather than conflict, excellence rather than mediocrity, work rather than laziness, justice rather than repression" (Prets, 2000, p. 21, p. 36). One of the aims of civic education is to create a civically active person's position to take the responsibility for his/her life and the life of others. Promoting tolerance is important pedagogical value in the process of acquisition of civic education, because tolerance is a prerequisite for people's mutual understanding (Ильин, 2009). It is the ability of a person to understand different looking for peaceful resolution of conflicts, reducing and eliminating various barriers.

The quality of the content and acquisition of civic education directly affects the quality of life of each person and society. Personality traits such as self-confidence, ability to influence one's destiny, social and civic competence, obligation consciousness, tolerance, altruism and empathy are no less important than cognitive abilities. Cultural education, as described by the educational researcher T. Erlih, is a combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation that allows the quality of society to be promoted, while in the center of civic education there is a tolerant, moral and civic citizen (Ehrlich, 2000). Thus, civic education can be characterized, among other things, as one of the preconditions for the development of tolerant attitude of young people towards themselves, their peers and the environment.

The knowledge and experience of world history allows us to be aware of the possible consequences of intolerance, which has become an extremeness of national chauvinism, which served as one of the causes for both the First World War and the Second World War. In order to prevent and mitigate possible geopolitical provocations of the 21st century and ensure the coexistence of different people, thinking about common future challenges and finding common elements in the common history, more attention needs to be paid to the issues of tolerance in school education. It should be noted that in the preamble of tolerance of The United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (*UNESCO*), the most effective means of promoting tolerance and reducing intolerance is education (*UNESCO*, 1995).

2. Youth Tolerance: Survey Results (summary)

The gathered results (Figure No.2) highlight the young people involved in the study are tolerant individuals, both in terms of tolerance towards people with different views and in terms of ethnic and religious tolerance, as reflected in the study data:

- 627 respondents (76%, most of the students involved in the study) expressed tolerance towards different view, only 29 (3.52%) of respondents have never been thinking about it, but 124(15.03%) respondents admitted that it was difficult to assess their attitude, while 45 (5.45%) but 124 respondents consider themselves as intolerant towards a different view;
- 568 (68.85%) respondents said that they are tolerant towards people with different religious belief, 82 (9.94%) have never been thinking about it, 108 (13.09%) respondents admitted that it was difficult

to assess their attitude, while 67 (8.12%) respondents consider themselves intolerant towards a person with different religious belief;

- 646 (78.3%) respondents expressed their tolerance towards other races, 51 (6.18%) have never been thinking about it, 68 (8.24%) respondents admitted that it was difficult to assess their attitude, while 60 (7.27%) consider themselves intolerant towards another race.

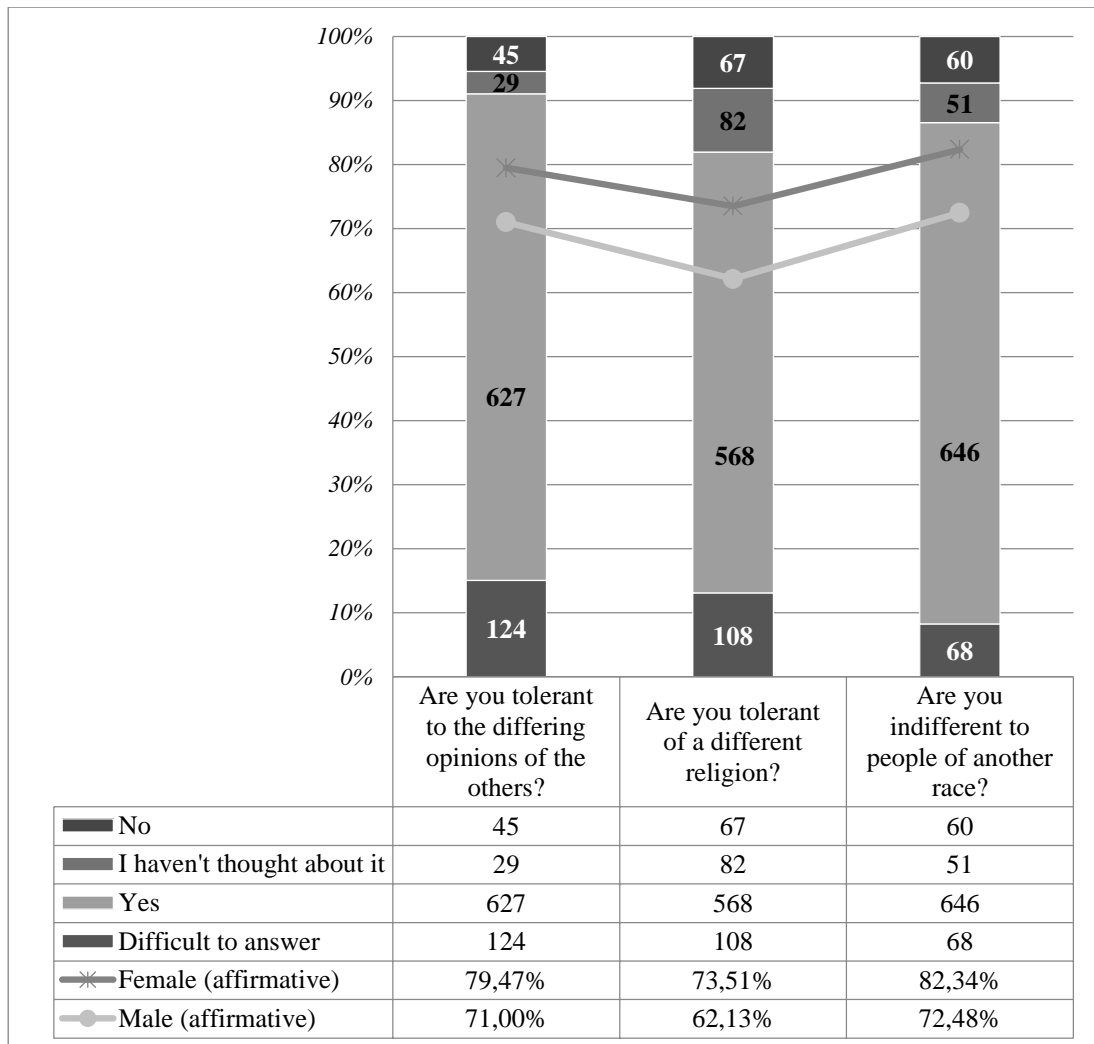


Figure 2. Self-esteem of youth tolerance (n=825)

Analyzing data describing the attitudes of young people in providing equal opportunities for different ethnic groups (Figure No.3), it can be concluded that:

- 707 (85.7%) respondents are convinced that all ethnic / racial groups should have equal opportunities to receive good education in Latvia, while 118 (14.3%) respondents are against it;
- 678 (82.18%) respondents are convinced that all ethnic / racial groups should have equal opportunities to get a good job in Latvia, 147 (17.82%) respondents think the opposite view;
- 718 (87.03%) respondents are convinced that all ethnic / racial groups should have equal rights and duties, while 107 (12.97%) respondents think the opposite.

In addition, according to the study, 712 (86.3%) respondents believe that schools should promote respect for different ethnic / racial groups, while 113 (13.7%) are opposed to it.

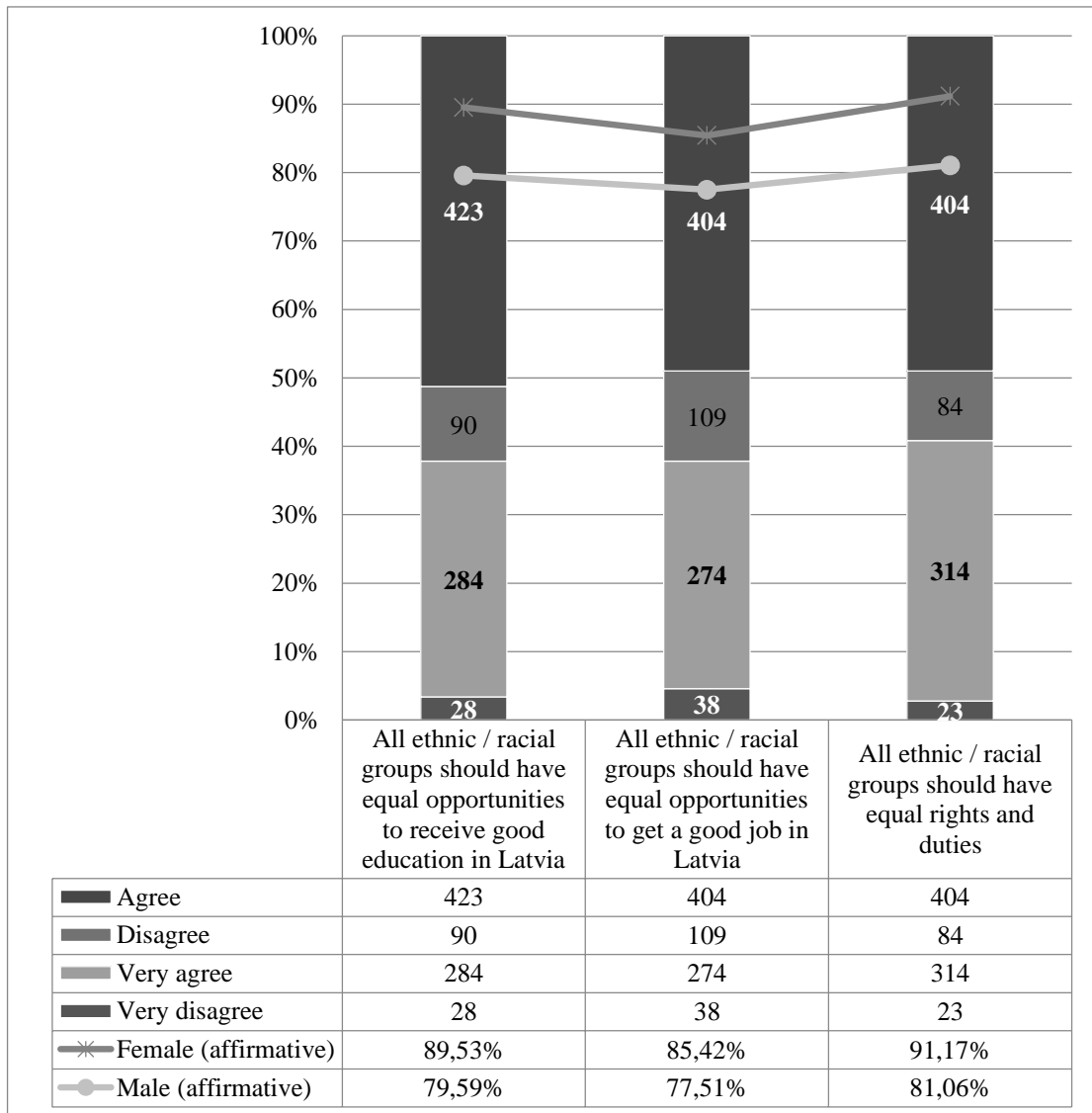


Figure 3. Youth attitudes to equal opportunities with different ethnic groups (n=825)

Conclusions

1. Promoting tolerance in the 21st century in the multicultural society is an essential precondition for both intercultural dialogue and the reduction of geopolitical problems. The radical nationalism expressed in Europe over the last century and the iron curtain is being replaced by democratic space in which there are several nations living in unity and diversity. Tolerance gets more and more every day to reduce existing discrimination and prejudice.

2. Despite the European philosophy of "Unified in diversity", the trends of globalization, and the fact that two out of three Europeans have friends with different religions or beliefs and three out of five Europeans have friends with different ethnic origins, the most common form of discrimination in the European Union is ethnic origin. Being conscious of the consequences of the European refugee and asylum seekers' crisis, ethnic origin may continue to prevail as one of the most common forms of discrimination in the European Union.

3. In the process of implementing civic education, the school promotes significant pedagogical values: motivation, responsibility and social activity of young people, which ensures the purposeful formation of the civic position of students. By engaging in specific practical activities, the students' individual tolerance criteria are improved, which promotes active civic position and the individual's psychological readiness to be tolerant and to create positive interactions when a person comes in contact with a different.

4. Implementation of civic education is one of the prerequisites for the functioning of the school as a social institution in order to purposefully and consciously develop tolerant attitude towards themselves

and other people and a cautious, sustained attitude towards the environment. Youth tolerance is an essential component of the process of acquiring civic education, which ensures respectful attitude and a civically responsible position.

5. The empirical part of the research confirms that in general, respondents involved in the research can be described as tolerant young people in different tolerance categories with high tolerance self-esteem. In a comparative perspective, girls may have a higher sense of tolerance than boys. This fact highlights the emphasis on better engagement of boys in the planning and implementation of social processes and activities in the school's pedagogical process.

Recommendations

1. To further youth tolerance in the pedagogical process the teachers should use varied pedagogical forms and approaches, promoting pupils' awareness of the need and urgency of tolerance. The learning process should be diverse and engaging, involving both the family and the local community.

2. The United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture noted that: "Each Government is responsible for enforcing human rights laws, for banning and punishing hate crimes and discrimination against minorities, whether these are committed by State officials, private organizations or individuals. The State must also ensure equal access to courts, human rights commissioners or ombudsmen, so that people do not take justice into their own hands and resort to violence to settle their disputes" (UNESCO, 2014). Looking for this perspectives it is logical to admit that each state have responsibility and obligation to promote the understanding of tolerance among young people in order to promote in the long term a tolerant and civic society.

3. For the implementation of the long-term development and promotion the sense of belonging, it is very important and, therefore, it is recommended to update the civic co-responsibility and civic engagement issues in the family. Family is the environment where parents help children to develop their individual civic position with respect and responsibility towards themselves, people around them, neighbourhood, city, country, Europe, cultural heritage, history and traditions. It is parents' responsibility to educate their children not to be indifferent and passive observers, but rather to become responsible citizens of the country.

4. Parents are role models for their children and observed sense of tolerance in the family can become a leitmotiv for youth civic action in future, therefore the model of parents should contribute to the development of civic attitudes.

5. Opportunities for young people to spend their leisure time in a meaningful and purposeful way are essential in the process of the development of civic attitudes. Thus, it is very important for parents to encourage youngsters to fill their leisure time with worthwhile activities in order to facilitate to the formation of civic attitudes.

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