FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN THE MULTIRELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT OF UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

There is much evidence that suggests that at the present stage of the development of mankind, tolerance is becoming of much importance, since it is one of the possible ways to overcome social tension and the necessary condition for ensuring peace, security, sustainable social and economic development, building human relations on the principles of equality, mutual understanding, and reciprocal respect. Tolerance is fast becoming the point of much importance for modern world and has always been a point of interest for a wide range of various Social sciences. Tolerance is the subject of political discussions aimed at overcoming world crises and preventing the horrors of ethno-religious conflicts. However, the concept and the problem of tolerance, despite a wide aura of application and frequency of its use in public speeches and media materials, remain open to sociologists, political scientists, teachers and psychologists. In the new global age, the teaching of tolerance is a strategic task of the 21st century education.

A primary concern of the paper is our attempt to systematize the factors that influence the formation and development of religious tolerance not only as a declared value, but also as a personal quality. Empirical research has shown that there is an important group of factors determining religious tolerance. The vital aspects are such personal traits as self-awareness and self-identity. We see promising areas of further practical application of the scientific research. In our future studies, we intend to determine possibility of using the results of this paper for a model of religious tolerance formation among university students in the process of liberal arts training.

Keywords: religious tolerance, religious pluralism, level, multicultural environment, university

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1. Introduction

There is a growing body of literature which recognizes tolerance as a complex social phenomenon. Being synthetic, integrated, connected with the whole complex of social relations, it assumes a certain matrix of social connections, cultural codes, practices, signals, resources, Therefore, the form of its existence in the social reality is diffuse [1]. The complexity of the tolerance concepts' interpretation indicates the multifaceted nature and integrative core of this phenomenon.

The education of tolerance has emerged as a powerful necessity for Kazakh people and, first, for such a category of population as university undergraduates. Nowadays, universities face an important task - to train not only highly-qualified professionals in this or that branch of specialization, but also a tolerant personality.

The leading trend of the modern civilized world is the introduction of democratic principles of society, including religious ones. At the legislative level, legal equality of religious organizations is prescribed. Naturally, ensuring the possibility of exercising one's religious beliefs plays a pivotal role in these conditions. It is equally important for the members of religious minorities. In the scientific and publicist spheres, ideas of freedom of conscience and religion, tolerance, religious tolerance, etc. are popularized [2-4].

The nature of tolerance has received considerable critical attention and remains complex. Modern civilized society proclaims tolerance as the recognition by an individual of the existence of alternative worldview, beliefs (including religious ones) and their perception without hostility. This was preceded by the recognition of the freedom of conscience of every person, that is, his right to any religious or non-religious beliefs. These principles are fixed in documents of international importance, namely in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations General Assembly (Article 18), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Declaration of Human Rights, and others. Each participating state assumed responsibility for implementing the proclaimed principles and maximizing the possibilities for their implementation by everyone. This is called religious tolerance, which is proclaimed at the legislative level equality. It refers to any non-destructive religious organizations.

The problem of religious tolerance is not a fundamentally new phenomenon in liberal arts, however, given the multicultural nature of our habitat, even within the framework of one state the problem of religious tolerance remains urgent and requires new theoretical solutions and ways of its improvement for the sake of an effective empirical embodiment.

Our findings support the idea that the issue of religious tolerance in the world is a very urgent topic, because there are many religions and every year their number grows. In these circumstances, the following questions arise: how can one coexist with adherents of different faiths, how not to violate another person's freedom of religion and at the same time defend oneself from the

encroachments of others on one's own religion? And here it is necessary to mention G. Terborn's remarks about the very essence of tolerance, for it is necessary to distinguish it from material tolerance, i.e. "tolerant attitude towards the thoughts and value preferences of the other" and formal tolerance, i.e. "the respect for the rights of the other to express thoughts and adhere to certain values, which is realized in the legal maintenance of the fundamental rights of freedom of religion, faith, conscience, and opinions" [5, p. 50].

A key aspect of tolerance is that at the individual level, it is integrated into virtually all human processes and properties. In our study, we consider groups of factors affecting the formation, manifestation, and stability of religious tolerance of the individual and their interconnections.

Numerous studies have tried to describe the social factors of religious tolerance. For example, the scientists A. Tatarko and N. Lebedev provide the following set of social factors: 1) the existence of a single state identity; 2) democratic society; 3) individualism; 4) the value of social integration; 5) promoting the unity and value of cultural diversity; 6) multiethnicity and multiconfessional social environment; 7) belonging to the majority group. As for the socio-psychological properties of the individual, then, according to many scientists, they are crucial in the process of forming a tolerant personality [6].

A number of surveys have postulated the importance of *self-concept* and *identity*. Religious tolerance is usually considered as a sign of a mature personality with stable self-concept or clear identity. Researches such as that conducted by E. Shliagina have shown that positive ethnic and religious identity is a necessary condition for tolerance [7]. Consequently, for a religiously tolerant person, positive image of representatives of other religions and ethnicities is characteristic on condition that there is positive image of one's own religion and ethnos. According to M. Walzer, positive ethnic and religious identity is a condition for peaceful interfaith interaction in a multireligious world, an interaction that excludes interconfessional phobias and confrontations [8].

Value orientations of the individual are a no less important factor of religious tolerance. Scholars consider tolerance as a value paradigm in relation to oneself and others. This value paradigm is stable in time and performs the functions of the individual psychological characterization of the personality, its quality, its property. At the heart of tolerant behaviour (proceeding from these provisions) is the positive recognition of one's own uniqueness and uniqueness of others, the perception of this fact as a blessing, as a value.

In 1998, A.G. Asmolov, basing himself on the positions of the value-semantic approach, interpreted tolerance as a basic value, one of the leading principles of community life in society. He noted that tolerance was, above all, self-education, and the development of self-restriction in oneself, attitude towards another from the standpoint of an equal [9].

In the recent years, there has been recognition of tolerance as a value, and friendly attitude to other cultures as an indicator of virtual tolerance. Reality manifests itself when a person comes face to face with a conflict that provokes him to make a choice. And the implementation of this choice on the principle of

tolerance is closely related to the nature of mental processes and the ability of a person at the right time to maintain criticality of thinking and the ability of volitional effort.

It has been suggested that *cognitive processes* are of much importance. Studies show that there is a relationship between constructs such as the need for cognition, the need for structure and the need for cognitive completeness with tolerance and intolerance. People with low need for cognition and high need for structure and completeness often resort to stereotyping in social judgments [10]. So, J. Cacioppo and R. Petty consider human interest in new information as a cognitive basis of interpersonal tolerance. It may contradict the previous experience and tolerance to uncertainty. However, this cognitive process results from the desire to see the world objectively, with all its contradictions and uncertainties, and not to simplify reality to understandable and simple forms [10].

Emotional-volitional processes are important determining factors of religious tolerance. Realization of the principle of tolerance in real life situations often requires the individual to voluntarily exert efforts not only to contain his own impulses, but also to uphold his principles, one of which is tolerance.

One of the important factors is patience, the essence of which is to inhibit impulsive states and actions. At the heart of patience are such volitional qualities of personality as self-control, self-restraint, and self-possession. Also, the necessary condition is emotional stability, as the ability to control and restrain the emotions that arise. It is difficult to overestimate the role of empathy in the formation of tolerance. G. Olport defines empathy as one of the leading signs of a tolerant personality [11]. The empathic person will first see the person, and not her cultural, religious, or ethnic identity.

2. Methods

The research used a convenience sample of third and fourth year undergraduates. 51 persons were included into the study. The methods used were as follows.

The methodology for diagnosing the types of ethnic identity by G. Soldatova, S. Ryzhova allowed to study ethnic tolerance. The authors of this methodology distinguish types of identity with different quality and degree of manifestation of ethnic tolerance from ethnonihilism to ethnofanatism and introduce the concept of norm, or positive ethnic identity, which provides clear identity and tolerance for other ethnicities and religions [12].

The multidimensional questionnaire study of self-relationship (MRS - the methodology of research of self-relationship), created by S. Pantileev, was used to gain insights into the factors of tolerance. The methodology contains 110 statements distributed over nine scales, and is intended for in-depth study of the sphere of self-awareness of the individual, including different aspects (cognitive, dynamic, integral) [13].

Five-factor questionnaire of personality adapted by A.B. Khromov (the author of the Japanese version is X. Teun) offered an effective way to diagnose the severity of such personal traits as extraversion-introversion, attachment-isolation, controllability-naturalness, emotionality-emotional restraint, playfulness-practicality [14].

3. Results

The correlation analysis of the data shows the invert correlation of low tolerance with emotional lability and sensitivity (-0.31). This observation brings us to the central emotional factor of tolerance – empathy. Such a link demonstrates that a person, who is sensitive to his own emotions and does not constantly try to control them, is tolerant, and, therefore, is capable of deep affection and compassion. Accordingly, people, who do not allow emotions to take over and are self-sufficient and arrogant, are capable of the oppression of others through religious affiliation.

It is also indicative that a lower level of tolerance is not characteristic of people with a predominance of playfulness (-0.32). They are less practical, open to new, dreamers inclined to see the world vivid and diverse, rather than focusing only on its material and rational side.

From the results obtained it is clear that the role of emotional processes in the formation of tolerance should be studied in detail. Obviously, this study should address the aspects of emotional intelligence.

As far as the self-consciousness and self-relationship of the person are concerned, it is important to note that the results of the research demonstrate the unconditional connection of the self-concept of the individual with a positive and responsible attitude towards oneself and positive ethnic identity. These positive attitudes are accompanied by a high level of tolerance which is a result of a conscious choice, i.e. the decision of accepting oneself and others. Provided this, the factors of religious tolerance are self-confidence, the value of one's own personality and acceptance of oneself. It is these components of the self-awareness of the individual that allow one to see the value and equality of others through the prism of one's own personality.

4. Discussion

The current study described that the formation of religious tolerance of students in the conditions of the university's multiconfessional environment is possible provided that the tolerant personality of the student is being developed in the multicultural educational environment of the university.

In 2000, P. Komogorov distinguished such components of a tolerant personality as formed inclination for tolerance, inclusion of tolerance in the individual value system, formation of knowledge about tolerance, formation of skills and skills of tolerant interaction [15]. In his opinion, the formation of a student as a person in university is influenced by the educational environment

around him. This environment is a result of interaction with classmates, students of senior or junior courses and teachers. The researcher defines the educational environment of the university as "an integral social and psychological space that encompasses a set of conditions, relationships that have developed on the basis of interpersonal interaction, a system of goals, intentions, communication and information that play an educational role, as well as organized educational influences, processes" [15, p. 126].

Previous research has established that to educate students as conscious representatives of civil society, it is necessary to create such an educational environment in which civil values are proclaimed, and which is multicultural in its content, capable of creating positive conditions for the full development, actualization and formation of the student's personality who is an equal subject of the educational process [16].

Nowadays, almost any university in Kazakhstan can be considered multicultural, as people of different nationalities and cultures study and work there. On the one hand, this presupposes high culture of interethnic relations, the desire for cooperation, the cultivation of universal values, and on the other hand - the educational space is characterized by the growth of ethnocultural complexity, the consequence of which are the complications of relations between students belonging to different ethnic groups and denominations, manifestations of aggression, contempt, distrust. There may be conflicts that can lead to extremely negative consequences. Both students and teachers often cannot solve the problems arising from the lack of tolerance among young people as an individual's quality.

In scientific research, the multicultural educational environment of an educational institution plays significant role in the upbringing of the religious tolerance of the younger generation. Researchers, considering the results of studying the problems of children and youth in modern multicultural society, argue that "the main technologies in multicultural environment should be technologies dedicated to the education of the personality's tolerance" [17, p. 292]. The current study found that one of the important tasks of the educational process was the education of students' multicultural consciousness, respect for human rights, national minorities, freedom of choice of place of residence and education, which were an integral part of free democratic society.

In teaching science, the concept of "multiculturalism in education" is explained as "building education on the principles of pluralism, recognizing the differences and equality of all ethnic, religious, and social groups relevant to this society, preventing discrimination of people by nationality, religion, sex, or age" [18]. This study is set out with the idea to consider in more detail how scientists understand the concept of 'multicultural environment'. V. Makaev, S. Malkova and L. Suprunova define it as "a kind of social environment in which representatives of different sociocultural groups interact with one another, although they differ in national distinctness, ethnicity, religious identity, national identity, cultural orientations, physical and mental characteristics" [19, p. 5]. The multicultural educational environment by E.A. Pugacheva is "a set of

subsystems that purposefully ensure the achievement of educational goals by participants of different nationalities and cultures, involved in the educational process" [20].

Researchers describe the following challenges of the multicultural environment in relation to the individual [21-24].

1. In the multicultural environment, the requirements for the individual are growing. The multicultural nature of the environment, surrounding the individual, requires the knowledge of more than one language (the more languages, the better); the knowledge of foreign languages leads to tolerant attitude to representatives of other cultures.

2. The multicultural environment potentially causes many threats: self-identification is complicated (due to the large number of possible roles, statuses, ethnic and national identities); chaotic adaptation to the social environment; intrapersonal chaos because of these processes, which can contribute to interpersonal chaos; the threat of distorted language learning (in an environment where two or more languages are used simultaneously).

With respect to all previous studies, we consider that for an adequate response to such challenges, the person must be adequately prepared, which can be achieved in the educational process of the university by applying certain educational technologies. We believe that the multicultural environment does not guarantee the education of religious tolerance, which is possible only if proper educational activity of qualified teachers is provided. However, there is much evidence that suggests that religious tolerance will help educate a dignified personality under the influence of various factors of multicultural space. Therefore, the transformation of students' environment into reality, which can influence the development of their personality, becomes a priority educational task.

Since the formation of student's religious tolerance significantly depends on the conditions in which the future expert obtains the higher education, it is extremely important to create tolerant educational environment to effectively educate people within universities' space, which, as A. A. Pogodina notes, is "a complex and dynamic system. It provides an atmosphere of nonviolence, tolerant interaction of actors, based on democratic style of leadership and communication, the acceptance by students of the values of one another." [25]

The results of this study show that the multicultural environment of the university becomes an environment where, in practice, one can apply the ideas of religious tolerance and discover tolerate attitudes toward others. Each educational institution needs to practice positive approach to ethnic and religious issues and prevent any manifestations of racism, extremism, xenophobia, nationalism, and the like. This is possible through the creation of friendly atmosphere in academic communities, respectful attitude to other people, understanding of the diversity of human life in cultural, religious, and social spheres, stemming from favourable microenvironment.

The results of the study indicate that the creation of the necessary conditions for positive interaction in multicultural environment will contribute to the fact that the educational environment of the university can become a place for possible interreligious discussion, help students overcome the fear of personal differences, and will let them positively perceive other people's differences. Another important finding is that the multicultural environment also contributes to the fact that teachers and students get acquainted with the peculiarities of the culture of other peoples, their traditions, customs, beliefs, social and everyday way of life, worldviews.

Our results further support the idea that professional training in an atmosphere characterized by diversity of interethnic cultures promotes the development of a culture of interethnic and interreligious interaction, mutual understanding, mutual respect, the emergence of new type of relationship - the dialogue of cultures. It leads to cooperation, tolerance towards other nationalities and beliefs, and implies respect for the dignity, honour, culture, language, history of each people, irreconcilability to any manifestations of national superiority, ridicule, or humiliation. One of the most important functions of such an environment is the ability to teach people to live together. To this end, education should help people to understand their roots and thereby determine the place that they occupy in the world.

It is common knowledge that modern Kazakhstan is largely multiconfessional community. The complexity of the socio-historical existence of the Kazakh people has shaped special worldview. The key strength of Kazakhstan is that it is a religiously pluralistic country since its appearance on the world map. Another important observation is that an important role in the formation of religious pluralism in this country was played by the fact that Kazakhstan had always been a kind of buffer zone between Russia and Asia: the Christian and Islamic world, Orthodoxy and Islam. The pluralistic world outlook and multireligious social structure on the territory of Kazakhstan was also ensured by mental and philosophical tolerance. The empirical findings of our study show that all facts considered provide grounds for asserting that a multireligious social structure has its historical roots in Kazakhstan. Much evidence suggests that the course of history formed Kazakhstan as a religiously pluralistic state, while simultaneously instilling in the Kazakh mindset the concept of religious tolerance [26].

The research will provide an additional framework for further study of democratic orientation in the rethinking of religious reality at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. The results of the research support the idea that the multireligious social structure in Kazakhstan is an objective reality, which cannot be ignored. This idea provides an important implication that the Kazakh religious consciousness has significantly increased. Nowadays, at the legislative level adequate conditions for religious pluralism have been created in Kazakhstan. With the proclamation of independence, Kazakhstan unequivocally declared religious tolerance and absolute freedom of religious expression as an overwhelming value.

The current data highlight the idea that tolerance presupposes the peaceful unification of people with different religious or atheistic convictions in one civil society and state. This principle would be effective if every member of such a society adopts and adheres to the laws of freedom proclaimed by the society [27]. The issue of religious tolerance is a controversial one, on the grounds that if a person is a faithful believer, then he cannot be truly tolerant, since in his vision of the world there already exists definite absolute and only possible truth, and, therefore, he cannot even assume the existence of alternative ones. He will never understand the convictions of other people, and the attitude towards them at best will be condescending, that in religious matters is nothing more than religious tolerance, provided that other people do not pollute the sacred objects. If the latter condition is not met, which often happens within the proclaimed principle of freedom of speech then protests in a peaceful or aggressive form appear in religious community [23]. The emergence of such contradictions is not restricted at the legislative level, since this implies limiting the freedoms of one of the conflicting parties, and this is unacceptable within the framework of universal human values.

5. Conclusions

The results of the research support the idea that in a multireligious society religious tolerance assumes mutual recognition of legislative equality of each member of multireligious social structure. Furthermore, this recognition is focused around sovereignty and freedom, as well as the right to individual understanding of the truth, life position and values, openness, and respect for otherness, overcoming intolerance towards 'alien' (in its confessional manifestation).

Empirical research has shown that an important group of factors of religious tolerance are personality traits such as self-awareness and identity. It is self-confidence, the value of one's self and the acceptance of oneself that allows one to see the uniqueness and equality of others through the prism of their own individuality. The results of the research also showed that the influence of the emotional processes, surrounding tolerance, cannot always be interpreted unequivocally. This group of factors is likely to gain more weight during the activities when a person faces a conflict situation and chooses a way of responding to it and to his opponents. That is why the measures aimed at developing religious tolerance among young people should be directed towards the development of positive attitudes about one's own personality and the awakening of interest in the diversity of the world.

The principal theoretical implication of this study is the observation that the need of society in a tolerant personality puts before modern educational institutions the task of in-depth study of the problem of tolerance development in the younger generation. Universities have significant educational impact on students, purposefully and systematically influencing the development of their self-awareness. It is the educational space of higher educational establishment

that can become a place, where students can learn a new model of behaviour - tolerant behaviour. At the same time, the youth environment in educational institutions becomes a space, in which it is possible to learn the diversity of the world and to develop a dignified, humane personality in the future professional. This result can be achieved through purposeful educational activity. We believe that the education of young people should take place in tolerant environment of the university, in the centre of which is the activity of tolerant teachers, positive tolerant relations among classmates and fellow students, and cooperation among students and teachers. The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice. Education in the multicultural environment of the university involves the adaptation of a person to the values of different cultures, the relationship among people with different religious traditions, the focus on the dialogue of cultures.

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