The Role of Youth on Social Interaction among Ethnic Groups in Iran (Case Study: Pre-university Students in West Azarbaijan Province)

Sayyad Golshan[1]
Seifollah Seifollahy[*][2]
Alireza Mohseny Tabrizi[3]

Abstract:

Social interaction among different ethnic groups has been a major focus of study in the world in recent decades. The population of Iran is composed of variety of ethnic groups (such as linguistic, religious and cultural) and for this study the people of different backgrounds are considered. This article will discuss the types of social interaction among different ethnic groups and the role of youth in Iran. This research was carried out in 20 high schools in west Azarbaijan. The nature of social interaction in this study is classified according to several factors such as ethnicity, gender, and academic achievements. The students were given a set of questionnaire and findings were analyzed quantitatively and the results showed that students prefer to be mixed with others in their own ethnic group.

Keywords: Social interaction, Ethnic group, Cultural, Azarbaijan.

1 .Department of Sociology, Science & Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

2. [*] Department of Sociology, Science & Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran (Corresponding author)

3 .Department of Sociology, Tehran University, Tehran, Iran

1. Introduction

A unique characteristic of our society is that the social groups are from different ethnic groups namely Turks, Kurds and others. These ethnic groups have their own cultures that will affect their behaviors and actions. The main goal of Iranian Education system is to enhance social integration and to eliminate social prejudices and discrimination. In Iran, the objective of nation building and forging national unity amongst the various ethnic groups ranks very high in its educational and political agendas. In fact National unity and integration is the cornerstone of education policy.

One way to achieve these goals is to provide an opportunity for students of different ethnic groups to interact with each other. In essence, the argument holds that bringing all ethnic groups together will lead to cross –racial contact, which will lead to better understanding of other ethnic groups and would also promote greater social tolerance and interaction (Smith, 1954).

From the perspective of the inter-group contact theory, it was believed that continuous interactions among members of majority and minority groups would lead to improvement in social relationships among them. According to Allport (1954), this expectation will have a positive result if certain conditions prevail. Stating that inter-group contact would lead to a reduced inter-group social violence, if the contact situation embodies four conditions: 1) equal status between the groups in the condition, 2) common goals, 3) no competition between the groups, and 4)authority sanction for social interaction.

2. Literature view

The purpose of this study is to understand the inter-ethnic interaction amongst students of various ethnic groups in high schools. This study also examines factors that may influence inter-ethnic relations and also to identify types of social interactions amongst various ethnic groups in high schools.

The data from the survey was analyzed and the findings will be discussed in the subsequent order. First, it is described the pattern of several items that construct the social interaction variable with referring to the particular ethnic group. Second, it will answer the question that was proposed earlier.

There are several items that made up social interaction construction are as follows:
1-Threatening by the other students who belong to ethnic groups
2-Playing at school with other ethnic groups students
3-Studying and discuss learning material with other students
4-Quareling and misunderstanding with other students

5- Getting help from friends and other ethnic students

6- Lending personal things to students from other ethnic group

The responses recorded on a Likert scale. The points allocated for each item were 1,2,3 and 4 which represent each response category of "never", "seldom", "sometimes" and" always", respectively.

1- Students perception of being threatened at school according to ethnic group.

A simple descriptive analysis was conducted to get the frequency of students responses to the item (i.e .degree of occurrence that have threatened) for each ethnic group. The data result shows that students being threatened at schools by other ethnic groups are still not a serious matter. However perception should be taken to prevent uneasiness among the students from different ethnic groups. Enhancing positive social interaction will promote understanding and cohesiveness among the students from different ethnic groups

2- Students perception of quarreling and misunderstanding according to ethnic group.

Analysis was conducted for each ethnic group referring to their perception of fighting and misunderstanding with their own friends from the same ethnic group or other ethnic groups. The survey reported an increase interaction among how the Turk students viewing the fighting and misunderstanding at school with either their group or other ethnic groups (Kurds and others). In conclusion, fighting and misunderstanding are two serious problems that should be handled properly by the school authorities. More seriously the fighting or misunderstanding occurs between ethnic groups.

3-Students perception on studying and discussion learning material based according to ethnic group.

It is referred to the students' preferences to study and discuss learning materials with other students from certain ethnic group. Kurdish students preferred to study and discuss with their colleagues from same ethnic group. Similar pattern within Turk and Kurd ethnic groups are shown. The result shows that most of them preferred their own ethnic group to study or discuss their learning.

4- Students' perception on asking for help according to ethnic group.

It was found that each ethnic group always referred to their friends from the same ethnic group when the need or seek for help. They seldom seek help from other ethnic groups. These finding show that ethnocentrism still exist among students in high schools although they are studying together.

3. Perception of students of the social interaction in the sample school

Hurst (2003) argued that social interaction is a form of action with one another in a means of communication both verbally and non-verbally. These actions can have different meanings depending on where we live and what you are doing at that given time. The societies share many of the same meaning of different types of social interaction that other societies may not. Social interaction is present in all societies and plays a huge part in how people relate to each other, do tasks, and in general, live their lives. Hurst (2003) further clarified social interaction as the process by which people act toward or respond to one another. Such interaction involves the interplay of many factors including our perceptions, cognitions and behaviors in specific social contexts.

3.1. Ethnicity and Social interaction

According to Hurst (2003), social interaction can be affected by several factors, such as ethnicity, gender and social class. In general, ethnicity plays significant role because it regulates the way the environment is perceived by providing a foundation for what is right and acceptable. Ethnicity becomes a medium through which every experience is measured and thus controls what effect it has on an individual's identity. We questioned whether the ethnicity of the students would have any different in their perception of social interaction. The ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between ethnic group and the social interaction mean scores from the study. The dependent variable which was the ethnicity included three major ethnic group in schools, i.e. Turkish, Kurds and others. The dependent variable was the mean score of social interaction items. Table 1 shows that the ANOVA was significant where f (2.498)=4.306:p=0.014

Table1. ANOVA

Item	ss	d.f	m.s	F	sig
Between group	10.775	2	5.387	4.306	0.014
Within group	623.028	478	1.251		
Total	633.802	480			

Follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate pair-wise differences among the means. Turkey honesty is significantly different. There was significant difference in the means between the Turk and other ethnic groups but no significant difference between Turk and Kurd ethnic groups were observed.

Table 2. The results of post-hoc pair-wise comparison

	Items	Mean difference	Std. error	sig	0.95confidence	
					lower	upper
Turk	Kurd other	0.0792	0.11136	0.757	-0,1826	0.3410
		-0.3445	0.14042	0.039	-0.6744	-0.0142
Kurd other	Turk	-0.0792	0.11136	0.757	-0.3410	0.1826
		-0.4235	0.14758	0.012	-0.7704	-0.0766
Other Kurd	Turk	0.3443	0.14042	0.039	0.0142	0.6744
		0.4235	0.14758	0.0766	0.0766	0.7701

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05. As argued by Hurst, gender has it effect on social interactions. However, we should investigate whether the male and female students have significant differences in their perceptions on social interactions. Table 3 shows that the female social interaction means is a little higher than male.

Table 3. the mean and (sd) between groups

Gender	n	mean	Std deviation	Std. error mean
Male	285	8.6197	1.34520	o.o6494
female	195	8.7531	1.10345	0.07902

An independent t-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that there is no significance difference between male and female students in their perception of social interactions at schools. Table 4 show that:

Table 4. Leven Test

	Independent						
	Leven's quality of					t-test for	
	F	si	D	sig	Mdstd	0.95 interval difference	
						lower	upper
Equal variance assume	0.37	0.53	49	0.19	-	-	0.068
Equal variance not assume		411	0.19		0.102	-	0.067
					0.102		

The ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between three academic achievement and the social interaction score. Comprises of three achievement groups based on high, moderate, and low achievements. The dependent variable was the mean score of social interaction items. Table 5 shows that the ANOVA was significant $F_{(2,478)}=9.242$: p=0.000.

Table 5.one way ANOVA

	ss	df	Ms	F	sig
Between group	22.899	2	11.449	9.342	0.000
Within group	579.762	478	1.239		
total	602.661	480			

Follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate pair-wise differences among the means. A Turkey's HSD was used and the results of tests, as well as the means and standard deviations for the three ethnic groups are reported in table 6. There were significant differences in the means between the low and high achievements, and moderate with high achievements. But no significant differences between low and moderate achiever groups.

Table 6. Post-hoc pair-wise comparison between academic achievement groups

Achievement	Mean difference	Std Error	sig	0.95 confidence	
				lower	upper
Low achievers	-0.3670	0.17498	0.081	-0.7874	0.0354
	-0.6887	0.17522	0.000	-1.1006	-0.2767
Average achievers	0.3760	0.17496	0.610	-0.0354	0.7874
	-0.3126	0.10849	0.012	-0.5677	-0.0576
High achievers	0.6887	0.17522	0.000	0.2767	1.1006
	0.3126	0.10849	0.012	0.0576	0.5677

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

4. Conclusion

1n this section the nature of social interaction that exists in the high schools that had been chosen as a sample in this study will be discussed. The study revealed some findings, which are:

1- Each ethnic group had threatened them but it still not a serious matter. It seldom happened in school. However, precaution should be taken to prevent uneasiness among students from different ethnic groups. Enhancing positive social interaction will promote understanding and cohesiveness among the students from different ethnic groups.

2- Fighting and misunderstanding occurred frequently more within ethnic group compared to between different ethnic groups. However, there was sometimes fighting or misunderstanding in school between ethnic groups.

3- Each ethnic group preferred to study or discuss with their colleagues within the same ethnic group. They seldom or sometimes study or discuss learning with other ethnic groups.

4-   Each ethnic group always referred to their friends from the same ethnic group when they needed for help. They seldom ask for help from other ethnic groups. This finding showed that ethnocentrism still exist among students in the high schools although they were studying together.

5-   There was a significant difference between the ethnic groups in their perception of social interaction in school. The significant difference was found between Turk and Kurds with other ethnic groups.

6-   Gender has no effect to the social interaction in school. There was no significant difference between boys and girls regarding their perception of social interaction.

7-   Academic achievement did affect social interaction in schools. Students of high achievement show significant differences compared to students with low and moderate academic performance on their perception to social interaction in schools.

The typical picture in schools emerging from interviews with students and from our observation was one in which tended to be determined far more by the duration of time in school. According to Driedger, Giles and Tylor (1976), the longer the contract the better the relationship between ethnic groups. This seemed true from the findings. It was obvious that the degree of mixing between students of different ethnicities in a school is positively connected with duration of contact. This is appropriate with the contact theory of Allport (1954), that is contact and perceived social climate tend to reinforce interaction.

From the findings, students from the same ethnic group expressed favorable attitude among their own group. This finding is similar to Hallinan and Teixeira (1987) where whites preferred their own group. The evidence given is that of social values, salience of between group differences and better understanding .this was also congruent with the findings discussed earlier. Own group members are identified with and the liked to the extent that they possess resources to satisfy one's need (Gottfried.1974). Likewise other group members are seen mainly as individuals who are belonging to a different group. Mixing is more on the same ethnic background (Turner &Vaughan, 1981).

Assimilated attitudes exert a more subtle, yet discernible, influence on children's preferences. In this study, students show same ethnic preference in choosing friends. Rotheram and Phinney (1983) stressed that children develop expectations of how members of their own group interact, and in mixed settings, how other groups will react to certain situations. These stylistic differences can be a source of social discomfort and wariness (Schofield, 1981).

Another aspect that is related to interaction found in the study was students who are academically good mixed well. According to Biaggio (1969), academically good students have the ability to socialize well and know the difference that exists between groups. These students mix well as shown in the study.

In general, the relationship between students depends to some extent on the degree of match between their profiles. It is predicted that in areas in which there is similarity between groups there will be compatibility. Whereas in areas in which norms or rules differ, there will tend to be cross-ethnic conflict. However, the degree of cross-ethnic conflict in the research was not too critical except for bullying and stereotyping. This will be modulated by each group's awareness of social norms of the other group. Responses from students demonstrate that they are aware of the behavior of the other group.

References

1. Allport.G.W. (1971). *the nature of prejudice*. Cambridge: Addison-wesley.

2. Biaggio, A. (1969). Internalized versus externalized guilt: A cross cultural study. *Journal of Social Psychology,78*,147-149.

3. Driedger, L. Giles, W. and Tylor, S.(1976). Ethnic self-identity: A comparison of in-group evaluation. *Sociometry, 39*,131-141.

4. Gottfried, A, W. (1974). Influence of social power. *Psychological Reports, 34*,1147-1150.

5.Hallinan,M.T.,& Teixeira,W.(1987). Classroom racial composition and children's friendship. *Sociology of Education,51*, 270-282.

6. Hurst, J.(2003). Social interaction. retrieved October 25,2004.

7. Rotheran, M, J., and Phinney, J.(1983). *Intercultural attitude and behavior of children*. Italy.

8.schofield, J.(1981). The development of children's friendship. New York. Academic press.

9. Smith, L. (1954). *Society in action*. New York: Dryden press

10. Turner, J. and Vaughan,R. (1978). *Social categorization and social discrimination in minimal group paradigm* .New York. Free Press.