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Ethnic Tolerance Formation Among Students of Russian Universities: Current State, Problems, and Perspectives

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Abstract

Today the problem of ethnic tolerance, its formation and development, especially among different social groups, is becoming one of the most important social challenges, which makes it particularly interesting for social research. This article presents the results of a sociological study as well as recommendations for reducing ethnic intolerance among students of higher educational institutions. The article provides a general overview of the contemporary theories defining tolerance and inter-ethnic relations. Although this research involves different methodology types, its main goal is to explore the key factors of ethnic tolerance formation in the modern society. In the discussion of the phenomenon of tolerance, this article puts a special emphasis on tolerance in the students' environment. Sociological research of tolerance among the youth has great practical significance, especially in multi-ethnic societies. At its preparatory stage, the research involved the application of the standardized linear and track models 'Level of Students' Ethnic Tolerance'. The article presents the results of the applied sociological research of the Ural Federal District ethnicity conducted from April to September 2014. The analysis of the results has brought to light the factors which influence the ethnic tolerance level of students of the Ural Federal University.

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1. Introduction

In the globalized modern world, there are social changes which affect different spheres and conditions of social life. Such dynamic changes lead to transformation of social norms which regulate human relationships: this fact is

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especially evident in the field of national and international communication related to the perception and formation of people's attitude towards somebody or something 'different'. What this situation requires is not only the modern means of communication for people of different nationalities, but also the new forms of their socialization. In this context it is really important to study tolerance as a social phenomenon, the mechanisms for development of tolerant attitudes, and the appropriate behaviour in the university environment. It is obvious that the educational system shapes the new generation's world outlook by being a leading institution of socialization, which makes it all the more urgent that universities dealt efficiently with this new challenge. It is important to emphasize that the youth environment itself is, on the one hand, a field for establishing new contacts and connections but, on the other hand, it is perceived by many people older generations as a 'different or 'alien' environment. This controversy between different generations is a complicated issue which needs to be resolved through a constructive dialogue.

2. Importance of Ethnic Tolerance: a Sociological View

There are numerous philosophical, sociological, psychological, and other works devoted to the phenomenon of tolerance. From these authors' point of view, this problem penetrates the life of all people, since it starts with a simple question about accepting 'another', different opinion and extends to the attitudes towards different forms of deviant behaviour.

Despite the fact that tolerance penetrates all areas of life and for many people ceases to be just an abstract concept, its interpretation appears to be a quite complicated problem. On the one hand, this concept has been widely spread due to the fact that it reflects the urgency of socialization processes and adaptation of new forms of interpersonal and social interaction. On the other hand, according to Hayd, there is another, parallel trend of the 'old scope of zero tolerance' being preserved, which leads to the question about what constitutes the essence of tolerance (Khomyakov & Polyakova, 2007). Russian and foreign scholars do not give a clear answer to this question.

Let us dwell on the views of reputable scholars in the field of inter-ethnic relations and tolerance: for instance, according to Drobizheva, tolerance is a personal or group quality manifesting itself as 'willingness to accept the "others" the way they are and to interact with them on the basis of understanding and consent' (Drobizheva, 2003, p. 305). Matskovsky is also of the opinion that tolerance is a qualitative characteristic but not that of the subject and object of tolerance. Instead, it is 'a certain quality of interaction between the subject and the object of tolerance, characterized by the willingness of the subject to accept sociocultural differences of the object, including the external signs, specific features of behaviour' (Matskovsky, 2001).

Despite the significant differences in the views of Drobizheva and Matskovsky, they represent the two sides of the phenomenon of tolerance: the process and the result of the phenomenon, each of them having their own quality characteristics. Tolerance as a process is related to the state of endurance in interpersonal and intergroup relations. As a result, tolerance can be reflected in the qualitative characteristics of an individual or a group and establishes some boundaries.

In this article, tolerance is defined as a means of social interaction between the subject and the object characterized by a certain distance in their relationship (Ananina & Korableva, 2014). This distance can be determined by: 1) an expectation of some other kind of behaviour; 2) judging the other's behaviour as deviant / its interpretation as deviant; 3) noticing the difference between the behaviour of others and your own behaviour; 4) importance of behavioural peculiarities; 5) ability to influence other people's behaviour; 6) influencing somebody else's behaviour to your own advantage (Loginov, 2013). Therefore, *interaction* stems from people overcoming the contradiction between the norms which they have already internalized and the variety of other people's behavioural patterns. It also stems from overcoming one's subjective attitude towards the existing variety of behavioural patterns as deviant ones in order to establish bilateral cooperation.

Studies of tolerance are based on the concepts of social interaction in particular situations. Its causes and consequences contain limitless exchange of information which has a subjective value but in case of a social need, it takes the form of an objective fact (or, according to Durkheim, a 'social fact'). These facts (representing rules, norms, roles, status) exist in the social space as symbols, determining the potential for social interaction.

Sociological analysis of tolerance among students has practical significance, especially in a multi-ethnic society. In the past decade in many large Russian cities, where the Russian population traditionally predominated, the ethnodemographic situation has changed. This transformation is characterized by an increase in non-indigenous

population, which continues to grow due to migrants arriving from different areas, including the countries of the former USSR. What will people's readiness for constructive interaction depend on? In this case, ethnic tolerance is likely to be determined by the choice of this or that strategy of inter-ethnic communication. The sociological study of formation of ethnic tolerance was conducted in April - September 2014 by these authors.

3. Analysis of the Ethnic Structure of the Regional Population

The first stage of the investigation was studying the ethnic structure of the Ural Federal District in Russia. As the results of the 2010 Census show, 12,143.4 thousand people representing 8.4% of the population of the Russian Federation live on the territory of the Ural Federal District (UFD) (All-Russia population Census, 2010). The urban population prevails (80%), with the population density being 6.7 persons per square kilometer. There are 120 ethnic groups living in the UFD; there are more than 40 religious denominations and 1,300 religious associations registered. Table 1 shows the distribution of the main ethnic groups in the administrative subjects of the UFD.

Table 1. Ethnic structure of Ural federal district

		Administrative subjects of the district						
	Sverd-		Chelya-		Khanty- Mansi	Yamal- Nenets		
	lovsk.	Tyumen.	binsk.	Kurgan.	Autonom.	Autonom.		% of the
	oblast	oblast	oblast	oblast	Area	Area	Total	population
Ethnic group	<u> </u>		ı	Absolute ratio	1	1	1	of the district
Russian	3684843	2352063	2829899	823722	973978	312019	10976524	82,31
Tatar	143803	239995	180913	17017	108899	28509	719136	5,39
Ukrainian	35563	157296	50081	7080	91323	48985	390328	2,93
Bashkir	31183	46405	162513	12257	35428	8297	296083	2,22
Mari	23801	11042	2826	311	7289	2078	47347	0,36
German	14914	20723	18687	1740	6828	1847	64739	0,49
Azerbaijan	14215	43610	7213	1781	26037	9291	102147	0,77
Udmurt	13789	5093	2421	1579	3094	583	26559	0,20
Nenets	52	31621	10	24	1438	29772	62917	0,47
Khanty	138	29277	30	24	19068	9489	58026	0,44
Chuvash	8304	25690	6819	1364	13596	3471	59244	0,44
Belarusian	11670	25648	13035	2502	14703	6480	74038	0,56
Kazakh	4406	19146	35297	11939	4382	1532	76702	0,58
Kumyk	269	18668	124	2502	13849	4466	39878	0,30
Lezghian	1272	16247	481	191	13335	1879	33405	0,25
Moldavian	2336	15806	1618	815	9476	4712	34763	0,26
Armenian	11501	15542	9311	1750	6343	1605	46052	0,35
Uzbek	9358	14743	6446	536	9970	1775	42828	0,32
Tajik	11138	14328	7375	569	9793	1482	44685	0,34
Mansi	251	11614	22	13	10977	166	23043	0,17
Chechen	736	10502	766	569	6889	2434	21896	0,16
Mordvinian	6303	7444	12147	691	4936	1257	32778	0,25
Nogai	46	8888	11	1	5323	3479	17748	0,13
Kirghiz	6304	8652	1410	504	5012	1815	23697	0,18
Komi	445	8469	162	32	2364	5141	16613	0,12
Selkup	10	2065	0	2	27	1988	4092	0,03
Total	4036650	3160577	3349617	889515	1404357	494552	13335268	100,00

The most numerous ethnic groups in the UDF are the following: Russian, Tatar, Ukrainian, Bashkir, Azerbaijani, Kazakh. Interestingly, despite the fact that for a long time the population has been involved in inter-ethnic

interaction, they still differ in customs, traditions, and beliefs. It means that they have managed to preserve the peculiar features of their ethnic identity. This region is also characterized by gender imbalance, which predetermines the peculiarities of inter-ethnic interaction in various spheres of everyday life. It can be illustrated by an example of the age-sex distribution of Russians on the territory of Sverdlovsk region (with reference to the Census of 2010) (Fig. 1).

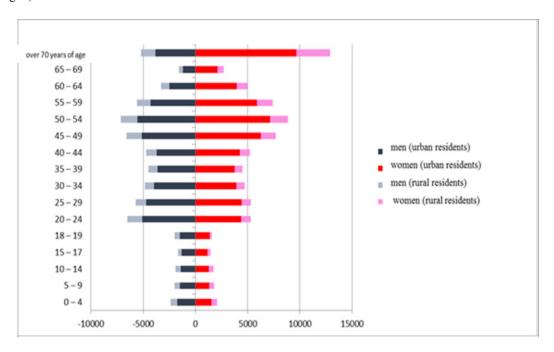


Fig. 1. Age and sex chart with regard to the nationality (Ural Federal District)

Another significant factor is that despite the fact that groups have sufficient experience of inter-ethnic interaction, they still differ in their customs, traditions, religion, which means that they have managed to preserve their ethnic identity.

The most numerous ethnic groups are represented by students of the Ural Federal University. The representatives of each group were included into this study's sample.

4. Heuristic Possibilities of the Linear and Track Models Application in the Study of Ethnic Tolerance

An important part of any research work is hypothesis construction. These authors suggest a model to describe the factors which influence ethnic tolerance of students.

Let us give a brief overview of the model applied. It is important to note that there are several types of models within the framework of social modeling: that of social interaction; social communication; a social structure; a social process; and, finally, the track model. In the social interaction model, the key role is played by a person's actions which have a subjective meaning. However, when they are related to other people's actions, they are automatically transformed into social ones (Weber, 1990). The social communication model can also be called a model of mediated social interaction since one of its components is the 'mediator' who transforms the original information. Thus, the reaction of the recipient focuses on the source of the message: the communicator. A special feature of the social process model is that it focuses primarily on development stages of the phenomenon in question (for example, some research considers adaptation as a process, so the interest focuses on the stages of this process). In the structure model, links between system elements and their interdependence in the overall hierarchy are disclosed. The

track model reveals causal relationships and shows how some factors (scale ones) affect the dependent variable (Fig. 2) through other factors (narrowly specialized, specific ones). It is also important to highlight another feature of the track model: the process of its modeling is correlated with the creation of a linear model (Fig. 2), which is the basis of the track model: it shows direct influence (power connection) which absolutely all variables (independents) have on the variable of interest. Conjugation of the track and the linear standardized models provides an integrated approach to the problem. Since we are primarily interested in the factors affecting the level of students' ethnic tolerance, the obvious choice for us is the starting pre-investigatory model.

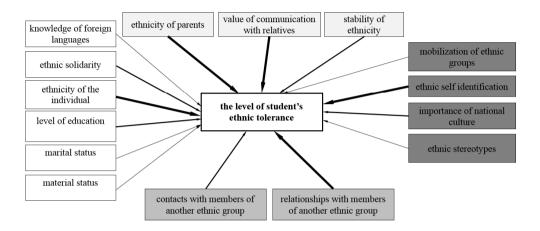


Fig. 2. "Ethnic tolerance level of students" linear model (with direct effect of variables)

The linear model assumes allocation of four factor groups (independent variables). They are the following: an ethno-social portrait of an individual (the block of variables on the left of the linear model, highlighted white); ethno-cultural individual attitudes (the block on the right, highlighted bright grey), the ethnic status of the family (the top block of variables, highlighted light grey), the environment (bottom block, grey). These blocks of variables allow us to apply an integral approach to studying the processes of tolerance: it is important to study not only a specific person but also their family relations, communication with their relatives, their family's ethnic status, the level of this person's 'ethnic tolerance' (in the linear and track models it is a dependent variable). All these factors, in our opinion, determine ethnic tolerance levels among the youth.

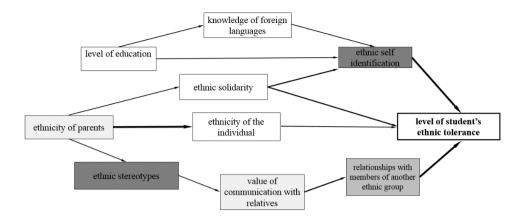


Fig. 3. "Ethnic tolerance level of students" track model (with indirect effect of variables)

It is important to note that not all elements (signs) of the linear model are reflected in the track model. It can be explained by the fact that modelling is a preparatory research stage and the connection strength along with the directivity of different features are not proven by any statistical data. However, at the level of research hypotheses, it is admissible to follow the 'rule of triangles'. This rule involves the analysis of the three variables forming a 'triangle'. Furthermore, all the arrows in Fig. 3 have different thickness, which indicates the strength of the connections between the signs (the thicker the arrow is, the stronger is the connection, and vice versa). We have the following base of the triangle and its vertices: 1 – the top of the base on the left; 3 - the top of the base of the right; 2 - the top of the triangle. Let us assume that we need to 'get' from point 1 to point 3 directly or through the vertex 2. If we assume that the 1-2 connection strength is stronger than the force 2-3, then we have two options: the path 1-3 or that of 1-2-3, but going through the connection 2 the strength weakens, which means that going through the top 2 is not constructive (this peak can be excluded, it is insignificant). However, if going through the top 2 the connection strength is enhanced (that is, the connection 1-2 is weaker than that of 1-3), then it turns out to be the measure of constructive importance of the trait (in this case it is unnecessary to exclude this feature).

Taking into account the experience of developing standardized research models, it can be concluded that their application can improve the heuristic potential of scientific research and that they should be more widely used in empirical social studies.

5. The Index of Tolerance and the Type of Students' Ethnic Identity

The next stage of this research was a study of the ethnic identity and the ethnic tolerance level among the students of the Ural Federal University. The empirical research base was provided by a questionnaire survey conducted by these authors in 2014 among UrFU undergraduates (sample size N = 318 people). The survey was conducted among the first and second-year students of the following institutes: GSEM (Department of Economics, Department of Management) and ISPS (Department of Social and Political Studies). When processing the statistical data, the SPSS 18.0 statistical software package was used.

One of the research objectives was to find out the index of tolerance for the students along with the type of their ethnic identity, to analyze the current situation at the university and to understand whether ethnicity influences group interaction. Our research targets also included comparing the situation at the Ural Federal University with that of other universities of the Russian Federation and conducting a secondary sociological case study. (For diagnostics

of the general level of tolerance, the express questionnaire 'Index of Tolerance' can be used. It is based on domestic and foreign experience in this field (Soldatova & Ryizhova, 2007) (Table 2).

Table 2. Tolerance level of UrFU students

Level of tolerance	% of respondents
High	3,8
Average	94,3
Low	1,9
Total	100

For a qualitative study, the authors of the techniques applied offer a number of questions to identify subscales of 'ethnic tolerance' field (Soldatova & Ryizhova, 2007). The students of the Ural Federal University demonstrated the following results on this scale (Table 3).

Table 3. Ethnic tolerance level of UrFU students

Level of ethnic tolerance	% of respondents		
High	5		
Average	92		
Low	3		
Total surveyed	100		

According to the authors of the above-mentioned method, transformation of ethnic identity is influenced by the growth of ethnic intolerance, especially under the circumstances conducive to ethnic tension. And, of course, tolerance / intolerance is a key aspect of the issue of inter-ethnic relations. The authors of the method explore the phenomenon of growing ethnic tension from the psychological point of view, which in their interpretation is determined by the level of 'negativity' towards people's own ethnic group and others. The questionnaire was designed in accordance with this understanding but it can also be applied in a sociological study. Thus, the level of 'negativity' is understood as a 'threshold of emotional response to a different ethnic environment, expression of aggressive and hostile reactions towards other groups'. In our opinion, the level of 'negativity' corresponds to the ability of an individual to fit in with another ethnic group or to accept a person from another ethnic group: these factors affect the formation of the group's boundaries.

'Types of identity with a different quality and degree of manifestation of ethnic tolerance are distinguished on the basis of a wide range of ethnocentrism scale, starting from the "denial" of identity, when negativity and intolerance towards one's ethnic group is observed, and to national fanaticism, which is the apotheosis of intolerance and the highest level of negativity towards other ethnic groups' (Soldatova & Ryizhova, 2007).

Most of the students surveyed (68.9%) have shown normal or positive results in the ethnic identity aspect, which means that the students combine a positive attitude not only towards their own ethnic group but also representative of other ethnic group. Their ethnic tolerance is well-balanced, which enables them to preserve the specific features of their own group, on the one hand, and constructively interact with other ethnicities, on the other hand.

The results have also shown that the number of the students with an intermediate level of ethnic tolerance (81.1%) differs from that of the students with positive ethnic identity (68.9%). The respondents found in the group with an intermediate level of ethnic tolerance had a boundary result, which, in fact, could be considered as a high or low level of ethnic tolerance. This feature manifested itself at the stage of diagnosing their type of ethnic identity.

Another most widely spread type is 'ethnonihilism' (10%), which means that some students showed that ethnic identity is not important to them. These students tend to distance themselves from their own ethnic group by constructing more beneficial interaction strategies and achieving desired results.

A part of the respondents (7.9%) are characterized by ethnic indifference, which is not a demonstrative choice of one ethnic group over another or claiming that ethnicity is not as important as other factors, as it is typical of 'ethnonihilists'. It probably has something to do with the fact that these respondents did not have any negative

experience in interacting with representatives of other ethnic groups or that they cannot choose one specific ethnic group as their 'own' because their parents are from different ethnic groups.

Ethnonihilism and ethnical identity are also called 'hypoidentity' as the representatives of these types are the least prone to destructive ethnic interaction. Aggravation of inter-ethnic relations is caused by transformations of ethnic self-awareness according to the hyperidentity pattern, which corresponds to ethnoegoism, ethnoisolationism and ethnofanatism.

The next group of the respondents is characterized by ethnoegoism (5.7%). It is expressed through evaluating a person with a different ethnicity through the opposition of 'our people' – 'not our people' and, therefore, claiming that 'our people' should have more rights than others. Ethnic intolerance can manifest itself in criticism of other ethnic groups.

The next form is ethnoisolationism, which prevails among 4.4 % of respondents. Ethnoisolationism refers to the belief in the superiority of one ethnic group. This type manifests itself through the recognition of the need to 'purify' the national culture, negative attitude towards inter-ethnic marriages, and xenophobia. In our view, the limit of these students' ethnic tolerance is particularly evident in their attitude to mixed marriages, although they don't go as far as to advocate ethnic cleansing.

The last and most extreme form is ethnofanatism (3.1%). It implies readiness for any actions in order to protect the interests of the interests of these students' ethnic group. In their ethnic interaction, these students are willing to demonstrate any ethnic tolerance.

We would like to highlight that the above-described 'ideal types' of ethnic identity are complementary to each other and in reality they usually exist in mixed forms.

According to the research results, the absolute majority of UrFU undergraduate students have showed an average level of ethnic tolerance. This indicates that students combine both tolerant and intolerant attitudes.

After analyzing the data received by tolerance surveys among students of other universities (Fig. 4), it can be concluded that the level of tolerance of UrFU students is quite low. In our view, it can be explained by the influence of several factors: firstly, where the students originally came from (a small town or a city) (Table 4).

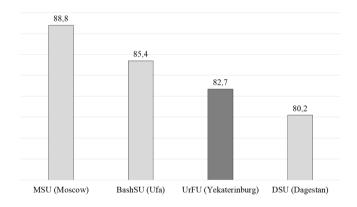


Fig. 4. Ratio of tolerance level among students of Russian universities (index of tolerance score ratio)

Table 4. Type of the city/town the student was born in

City/town type	%
Less than 50 thousand residents	43
50-100 thousand residents	21

250 thousand – 1 million residents	21
100-250 thousand residents	15

6. The role of ethnic identity in the structure of ethnic tolerance

We assume that the core of ethnic tolerance is ethnic identity, and, as many researchers point out, provincial residents have a more actualized and active ethnic identity than that of people from larger cities. Therefore, the latter face a more serious challenge when trying to preserve their ethnic identity and at the same time harmoniously integrate into a group, which involves accepting people who are ethnically different.

The next factor to be considered is that the Ural Federal University provides a new format of a higher education institution: it requires application of modern technologies to enhance students' adaptation; it needs academic mobility programs and an in-depth study of the ethnic structure of the student community.

As for the prospects of enhancing ethnic tolerance among students, it could be productive to use the potential of the university's main production resource, that of the academic staff. They are capable of affecting and developing students' ethnic tolerance.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, let us outline the possible perspectives of further research. For the authors of this article, they appear to be multifaceted: one of the possible research components is the innovation potential of the academic staff. This conclusion is based on the described study, which we conducted from April to December 2014. The empirical basis of this work was provided by a questionnaire survey conducted among the academic staff of the Russian higher school (sample size N = 204 people) and an expert survey of the academic staff (N=12). Therefore, it would be productive to consider Collins' ideas, who said: 'the educational system as such appears to us in a new, paradoxical way. It also opens new perspectives on a much more detailed micro-level of sociological research' (Kollinz, 2004, p.599). One of the structural components of the academic staff's innovative potential is their personal resources, which are inextricably linked to their commitment to innovation in higher education, their search for new approaches in teaching students from the inter-ethnic environment.

So, according to the survey, the main motives of the academic staff's initiatives should be as follows: 'communication with students' (55.2%, first year); 'the desire to continually update educational courses' (14%, fourth year), 'the desire to be a professional innovator' (1.5%, fifth year), while 'the significant changes in professional activities' were chosen by every fifth respondent (20%). The results presented above explicitly emphasize the need of adapting the innovative potential of the academic staff to the multi-ethnic background of their students.

Following Collins' ideas, when a young person enters a new social environment, their inner world is 'filled' with the community they used to live in. According to Durkheim's philosophy, the second relevant thought developed by Collins is the significance of rituals in public life. The process of personality formation is connected to mastering a variety of rituals, which, in our view, makes an attitude to ethnicity an important aspect of everyday life. This also leads to the following question: can ethnic tolerance be a ritual or is it just a way of achieving a certain goal?

We do not seek to hide the evident problems related to the youth's ethnic tolerance behind the triviality of self-evident explanations. Ethnic tolerance should not be perceived as a pattern or a rigid norm. It seems much more efficient to explore deeper issues and concerns connected to the phenomenon of ethnic tolerance and, what is the most important, to analyze the arguments which young people choose to explain their behaviour towards representatives of their own or different ethnicity (Boltanski & Teveno, 2013).

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