

Article

## The Role of Universities in Promoting a Culture of Tolerance: An Empirical Study among University Students in Jordan

Page | 127

<sup>1</sup> Alsani Eman

<sup>1</sup>University Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

### CITATION

Alsani, E. (2024). The Role of Universities in Promoting a Culture of Tolerance: An Empirical Study among University Students in Jordan, *Intercontinental Social Science Journal*. 1(2), 127-138. <https://doi.org/10.62583/49gtv1322>

Received 06 Jan 2024  
Accepted: 12 Feb 2024

### COPYRIGHT



Copyright © 2024 by author(s).  
*Intercontinental Social Science Journal*, published by Pierre Online Publications Ltd. This work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

**Abstract:** This paper looks into how institutions of higher learning can facilitate sustainable development, especially in the culture of environmental sustainability among the university students. Sustainable development has been a significant issue in the world in the recent years owing to the growing environmental issues such as the climate change, depletion of resources and environmental degradation. In this case, the centre stage of creating awareness, defining values, and promoting environmental responsibility behaviour among students is expected to be played by the higher institutions of learning. The research paper assumed a descriptive survey research design and developed a structured questionnaire to sample 30 male and female students of the Faculty of Arts at Yarmouk University in the academic year 2023/2024. The tool was used to assess the level of awareness of the students on sustainability of the environment, the university response to the culture of sustainability, and the perceived barriers to the spread of the sustainability culture. The analysis of data was conducted in the framework of descriptive statistics, that is, means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages. The results show that the environmental awareness of sustainability is relatively high among the students. The findings also reveal that the university has a great role of disseminating sustainability culture using educational materials, sensitization efforts and institutional reinforcement. Nevertheless, a number of barriers were observed, such as the insufficient integration of environmental concerns into the academic programs, as well as a low level of student participation in the programmes regarding sustainability. The paper concludes that institutions of higher learning play a great role in fostering sustainable development yet their input can be enhanced by reforming the curriculum, offering more awareness programmes and participation of more students in environmental practices.

**Keywords:** *Sustainable development, higher education, environmental sustainability, sustainability education, environmental awareness, university students*

Corresponding author. Email: [Aymank22@gmail.com](mailto:Aymank22@gmail.com)

## **Introduction**

The world today is experiencing changes with rapid transformation that is brought by globalisation, growth in technology and cultural interaction. These developments have enhanced the necessity of nurturing values that can lead to peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and social stability. Tolerance is one of these values that have become pillars towards ensuring social cohesiveness and minimizing conflict in a society that is becoming more diverse.

Universities and other institutions of higher learning are at the centre of influencing student's values, attitudes, and social behaviours. Universities are not merely the places of knowledge production but also the places where people with different cultural, social, and ideological backgrounds have to interact. Such diversity provides the possibility to talk, think critically, and create tolerant attitudes towards others. In this respect, universities can be regarded as the major actors in facilitating intercultural understanding and strengthening the values of coexistence and social harmony.

Although there is an increase in the understanding of the significance of tolerance, the modern communities still have to deal with the issues concerning intolerance, social division, and polarisation of ideologies. International organisations such as UNESCO have stressed the relevance of education in fostering tolerance and curbing violence and the role of the institutions in instilling the same in their curriculum and practice. On the same note, educational theorists believe that tolerance must not be taught only theoretically, but also practically, through the activities of the institutions and social interaction.

The use of universities in instilling the act of tolerance in various contexts has been studied before with the different academic curriculum, faculty, and extracurricular activities playing a significant role in instilling the sense of tolerance among the learners. Nevertheless, the results of these studies are still contextual, and they have to be empirically explored further in a particular educational and cultural context.

In the Jordanian context, universities work in a socially and culturally diverse environment, and so they are also quite applicable in analysing the cultivation of tolerance among students. Nonetheless, a little empirical research has examined how universities in Jordan play an active role towards promoting a culture of tolerance amongst their students especially on the side of the students.

Hence this research paper aims at investigating the role of universities in instilling a culture of tolerance amongst university students. Particularly, it explores how faculty members, academic curricula and

university activities can help in building tolerance and whether there exists any significant differences depending on gender.

### **Problem Statement**

Although tolerance has been recognised to play a key role in ensuring societal cohesion and harmonious coexistence, modern societies are still faced with different types of intolerance, social fragmentation, and ideological discord. Universities as major social and educational structures are supposed to play a critical role towards inculcating tolerance among the learners. Nevertheless, the level of successful work of universities in the creation of the culture of tolerance is the empirical question that should be explored systematically.

Universities in the Jordanian context perform their activities in a culturally diverse setting, and thus the university environment is important in terms of tolerance and understanding of each other. However, the empirical evidence that studies how universities can promote tolerance based on the academic, social and institutional practices of the institutions, especially on the side of the students, is lacking. In line with this, the research issue of this study can be defined as follows:

How much can universities play a role in ensuring that the culture of tolerance is promoted among students of the university?

Regarding the problem statement the study aims to:

- Examine the role of faculty members in promoting a culture of tolerance among university students.
- Investigate the contribution of academic curricula to fostering tolerance.
- Analyse the role of university activities in enhancing tolerance among students.
- Identify whether there are statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of tolerance based on gender.

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the role of faculty members in promoting a culture of tolerance among students?
2. To what extent do academic curricula contribute to fostering tolerance?
3. What is the role of university activities in enhancing tolerance among students?
4. Are there statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of tolerance based on gender?

### **Literature Review**

The importance of universities in enhancing a culture of tolerance has gained growing academic interest over the past several years especially in regard to social cohesion and understanding of different cultures. Past researches have always highlighted the role of institutions of higher learning in inculcating values in students and inculcating acceptance and coexistence attitudes amongst them.

Various studies that were carried out in the Arabian world have indicated that universities have a very significant role of instilling tolerance among learners. As an example, Al-Ma'rouf et al. (2020) have discovered that Jordanian universities contribute significantly to spreading the values of peace and tolerance, and the statistically significant differences were found regarding gender. On the same note, Al-Jahni (2019) mentioned that universities also play a significant role in inculcating tolerance in students, and the importance of higher education institutions to provide education and social roles should not be underestimated.

As a similar situation, Al-Najjar and Abu Ghali (2019) found that universities can act as a potent force to increase tolerance among the students and faculty members, though no significant difference was revealed when it came to gender. Similarly, Assaf (2018) has demonstrated that universities can be used to instill tolerance and intellectual moderation in educational activities, and structured academic and social interventions are important.

In addition to the Arab setting, international studies have also been used to discuss the issue of building tolerance in the higher education setting. Koriakina (2019) has discovered that the general trends in students of Russian universities are positive regarding ethnic tolerance, yet the institutional educational programmes should be reinforced. In the same manner, Nagovitsyn et al. (2018) highlighted the need to come up with educational frameworks that will foster social tolerance in future teachers. Asiyai (2018), in his case study conducted in the Nigerian context, pointed out the importance of educational management, institutional climate, and life skills as the means of supporting the culture of peace and tolerance in the universities.

Although these studies have proven to be of value, their results are still context-based and in most cases, they concentrate on narrow parts of the university setting either in curricula or administrative procedures. Moreover, there is an absence of the in-depth empirical

research that will simultaneously focus on the faculty member, academic curriculum and extracurricular activities in fostering tolerance and especially in the context of Jordan.

Thus, this research aims to fill this gap by offering a combined discussion of the role of universities in the development of the culture of tolerance among students considering various institutional aspects and the views of students.

### **Hypothesis**

**H0:** There are no statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of the role of universities in promoting a culture of tolerance based on gender.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

In this paper the analytical method is descriptive in nature because it is deemed correct to study social phenomena, and investigate the relationship between variables within a certain population. The research employs a social survey approach in order to gather information on university students about their understanding of the role of universities in ensuring a culture of tolerance is instilled.

### **Population and Sample**

Philadelphia University in Jordan was the location where the study was conducted in the academic year 2022/23. The population of the study was made up of all students taking the Faculty of Education.

Simple random sampling technique was used to select a random sample of 30 students. The sample was composed of both male and female students and had various age groups. It should be mentioned that both traditional and non-traditional (mature) students were included in the sample that is why the sample contained higher age categories as well.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

The information was gathered through the use of a structured questionnaire that was specifically designed to be utilized during this research. The instrument was made up of three dimensions:

Faculty members and their contribution to tolerance (5 items)

The significance of academic curricula in causing tolerance (5 items)

The effect of university activities on tolerance (4 items)

The questionnaire had a demographic variable section that comprised gender and age.

### Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was checked by a group of academic professionals in the educational sphere in order to make the instrument valid. The items were modified based on their feedback to make them more appropriate in terms of wording, clarity, and relevance.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, the Alpha coefficient of Cronbach was used. The questionnaire had the overall reliability score of 0.76 which is considered to have acceptable level of internal consistency of a social science research.

### Data Analysis

The statistics were analysed with the help of the relevant statistical methods. The characteristics of the sample were described using frequencies and percentages. The means and standard deviations were computed to evaluate the perception of the students on the role of universities in fostering tolerance.

Moreover, the reliability of the instrument was measured by the use of Cronbach's Alpha. To verify the study hypothesis, inferential statistical test was performed through use of independent samples t-test to test the difference based on gender.

### Results

This section presents the findings of the study in accordance with the research questions. Descriptive statistical methods, including means and standard deviations, were used to analyse students' responses regarding the role of universities in promoting a culture of tolerance. In addition, inferential statistical analysis was conducted to test the study hypothesis related to gender differences.

**First Research Question Results:** What is the level of environmental sustainability culture among students?

To answer this question, means and standard deviations were calculated for each item related to the role of faculty members in promoting tolerance.

**Table 1**

*Role of Faculty Members in Promoting a Culture of Tolerance*

No.	Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Level
1	Faculty clarify that tolerance is an active value based on rights	4.42	0.86	High
2	Faculty shape students' attitudes towards non-violence	3.87	0.85	Moderate
3	Faculty explain how tolerance counters hatred	3.59	1.25	Moderate
4	Faculty develop students' conflict resolution skills	3.52	1.13	Moderate
5	Faculty encourage students to write about tolerance	3.22	1.14	Moderate
<b>Overall Mean</b>		<b>3.68</b>	—	Moderate

As indicated in Table 1, the findings represent that faculty members have a moderate contribution in ensuring the culture of tolerance among the students, with the total average score of 3.68. The results of Table 1 also show that the most rated item concerned explaining to the students that tolerance is not concession, but an active position founded on the understanding that individual rights and freedoms are involved, and the response also had a high rate of agreeableness with a mean of 4.42.

In comparison, Table 1 also reveals that the lowest-rated item was also connected to motivation of students to write on topics that relate to tolerance, with the average score of 3.22. This implies that faculty members are more impactful to the conceptual and value based concept of tolerance rather than its practical or written implementation. In general, the results provided in Table 1 indicate that the faculty members can indeed contribute to the promotion of tolerance significantly, although certain aspects of teaching practices need to be enhanced further.

**Table 2**  
*Role of Academic Curricula in Promoting Tolerance*

No.	Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Level
1	Curricula promote tolerance as protection against extremism	4.06	0.92	High
2	Curricula expand students' understanding of tolerance	3.73	0.98	High
3	Curricula include topics supporting social stability	3.53	1.53	Moderate
4	Curricula promote cultural and religious diversity	3.46	1.26	Moderate
5	Curricula address conflicting ideologies critically	3.10	1.40	Moderate
<b>Overall Mean</b>		<b>3.58</b>	—	Moderate

Table 2 indicates that the academic curricula has a moderate influence on inculcation of a culture of tolerance with a total mean value of 3.58. As evidenced by the data in Table 2, the most rated item was the importance of the curricula in introducing the concept of tolerance as the way of safeguarding a society against extremism and intolerance with the mean score of 4.06, and that demonstrates a high level of the students agreement.

Meanwhile, Table 2 demonstrates that the lowest mean score (3.10) was obtained in the item that concerned the methods of conflict between civilisations, cultures, and religions. It might demonstrate that despite the fact that the curricula uphold the overall concepts of tolerance, they are not as efficient in facilitating a closer critical approach to a problematic ideological and cultural matter. Thus, the findings presented in Table 2 indicate that academic curricula have a positive impact on tolerance promotion yet more curriculum development is required to improve its critical and analytic aspects.

**Table 3**  
*Role of University Activities in Promoting Tolerance*

No.	Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Level
1	Seminars and lectures address tolerance issues	3.88	0.73	High
2	Activities promote teamwork in a tolerant environment	3.70	0.98	Moderate
3	Activities develop conflict resolution skills	3.27	1.51	Moderate
4	Activities encourage practical engagement in tolerance	3.01	1.51	Moderate
<b>Overall Mean</b>		<b>3.38</b>	—	Moderate

University activities also play a moderate role towards improving the culture of tolerance with the mean score of 3.38 as shown in Table 3. The findings in Table 3 show that the best rated item was concerned

with seminars, and lectures that the college organised on the matters of education to tolerance with a mean of 3.88 which shows high level of agreement. This implies that one of the best ways in which universities can spread the tolerant values is by engaging in awareness-raising activities.

Nevertheless, Table 3 also shows that the lowest rated one was related to the level to which university activities give the students some practical chances of directly experiencing a culture of tolerance, with a mean of 3.01. This result suggests that the life of a university is more about awareness and the discussion of the theoretical issues than practical action and experience. In general, all the results observed in Table 3 suggest that the activities of the university serve to foster tolerance, yet there is need to include more active and participatory measures.

**Table 4**

*T-test Results Based on Gender*

**Gender Mean Std. Dev.**

Male 3.56 0.58

Female 3.57 0.47

Table 4 reflects the results of the independent samples t-test, which suggest that there are no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the male students and the female students in their perception of the role of the university in fostering culture of tolerance. According to Table 4, the significance value of 0.65 is not below the accepted level of 0.05.

As shown in Table 4, this outcome implies that gender does not seem to have any effect on the perceptions of students concerning the role played by the university in promoting tolerance. That is, the role of the university in a wide sense is similar to both male and female students. This can possibly imply that the academic and social practices of the university in terms of fostering tolerance are experienced within both groups in relatively equal measure.

### **Conclusion**

This paper aimed at analysing the purpose of universities in instilling a culture of tolerance among students with special reference given to the role played by faculty members, academic curricula and university activities. The results show that the role of universities in creating tolerance is significant and multidimensional, though it is not equally strong in the different dimensions of the institution.

The findings show that the role of the faculty members in cultivating the values of tolerance is positive, especially in terms of clarification of concepts and teaching in the value-oriented manner. Tolerance was also supported by academic courses against intolerance, which encourage social responsibility and awareness although their effectiveness in encouraging critical engagement is low. Likewise, university

activities also contribute to increasing the tolerance awareness; but, it is more theoretically rather than practically implemented in the activity.

Besides, the research did not depict any statistically significant differences according to gender, which implies that both genders have an evenly distributed environment at universities and both develop a comparable perception of tolerance.

On the whole, the research proves that the university is a significant social institution that influences the values of students and helps them coexist, but still, it is necessary to enhance the practical and experiential aspects of tolerance education.

### **Implications**

The results of the given study have a number of implications in the regard of higher education facilities:

- Universities are to be more integrated in terms of the introduction of tolerance-associated materials into academic programs, and focus more on critical thinking and intercultural communication.
- Teaching strategies used by the faculty members needs to be more interactive and participative and should not be restricted to theoretical explanations but instead should be practical.
- To foster tolerance, universities need to increase extracurricular activities that can foster tolerance via experiential learning by engaging in community activities, dialogue programmes and collaborative projects.
- Educational policymakers ought to realise that universities are capable of being the agents of social integration and promote policies, which enhance tolerance in universities.

### **Limitations**

Although this study has given a lot, it has a number of limitations that must be realized:

- The sample size used in the study was not much ( $n = 30$ ), and it might restrict the external validity of the results.
- The self-reported questionnaire was used to gather data and this risk might be subjective to bias in response.
- The research was performed in the framework of a single institution, which cannot entirely represent other institutions or cultural environments.
- The study was quantitative with no inclusion of qualitative research that would give more information about the students in terms of experiences.

## Recommendations

According to the results, the paper suggests the following:

Further studies ought to involve a bigger and more varied sample in various universities.

The scholars are urged to embrace mixed methods, which merge quantitative and qualitative data to obtain more knowledge.

Universities ought to come up with systematic programmes that will bring about tolerance by actual interaction and real life experience.

More variables, including socio-economic background, academic discipline, and cultural diversity, should be investigated with regard to tolerance in further studies.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest related to the publication of this research.

**Funding Statement:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency, institution, or organisation.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## References

- Abdullah, S., & Khalifa, M. (2001). *Social psychology*. Dar Gharib for Printing, Publishing and Distribution.
- Al-Awadi, R. (2005). Patterns of prevailing values among students of the College at Al-Azhar University and their relationship to the sovereign union (Master's thesis, Al-Azhar University).
- Al-Badaina, D. (2019). Values of tolerance in university education curricula. *Arab Journal of Studies*, 27(53), 177–205.
- Al-Jahni, A. R. (2017). The educational role of the Islamic University in Madinah in instilling students with the values of tolerance. *Journal of the College of Education, Al-Azhar University*, 176(2).
- Al-Khalil, S. (2019). Tolerance in the Western language. In *Tolerance between East and West* (4th ed.). Dar Al-Saqi.

- Al-Ma'rouf, L., Samara, M., & Al-Zaboun, M. S. (2019). The role of Jordanian universities in spreading the concepts of peace and tolerance among their students. *Al-Arabi Journal for Studies and Research*, 4, 15–22.
- Al-Muzain, M. H. M. (2019). The role of Palestinian universities in promoting the values of tolerance among their students from their point of view (Master's thesis, Al-Azhar University).
- Al-Najjar, Y. (2017). The role of higher education in promoting tolerance from the point of view of students and faculty members at Al-Aqsa University as a model. *Al-Aqsa University Journal of Science*, 21(1), 423–443.
- Al-Saeed, R. (2017). Religion and society in treatments, transformations, and destinies. *Tolerance Magazine*, 17, 67–112.
- Al-Sheikh, A. (2019). The role of the social worker in developing a culture of tolerance among university youth groups. *Journal of Studies in Social Service and Human Sciences*, 31(4), 1600–1699.
- Asiyai, R. I. (2018). Strategies towards effective management of higher education for building a culture of peace in Nigeria [Unpublished thesis]. Delta State University.
- Assaf, M. M. (2017). The role of universities in treating cognitive distortions and spreading the culture of moderation and tolerance among their students. In *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference: The crisis of understanding and its relation to the phenomenon of bullying and violence* (pp. 1629–1648).
- Badley, G. (2005). Against fundamentalism, for democracy: Towards a pedagogy of tolerance in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 10(4), 407–419.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510500239065>
- Doctor, E. (2019). Real religious tolerance between Christianity and Islam. *Sciences and Humanities in Civilization*, 4(2), 10–23.
- Gidori, S. B. A. (2015). The role of the College of Education in promoting a culture of tolerance among students from their point of view. *Kulliyat Al-Tarbiyya Magazine*, 31(2), 208–247.
- Halpern, L. W. (2019). The effects of higher education on tolerance: An investigation of political and cultural attitudes of college students. *Academic Forum*, 2(1), 31–34.
- Hawari, M., & Adoun, N. (2011, March 6–9). The role of the university in promoting the principle of moderation and intellectual security: A field study at the University of Laghouat in Algeria. In

The role of Arab universities in promoting the principle of moderation among Arab youth (Vol. 1). Taibah University.

- Koriakina, A. A. (2019). The problems of ethnic tolerance development among students. *Educational Process: International Journal*, 8(1), 85–90. <https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2019.81.6>
- Nagovitsyn, R. S., Bartosh, D. K., Ratsimor, A. Y., & Maksimov, Y. G. (2018). Formation of social tolerance among future teachers. *European Journal of Contemporary Education*, 7(4), 754–763. <https://doi.org/10.13187/ejced.2018.4.754>
- Sahin, C. (2018). Perceptions of prospective teachers about tolerance in education. *Educational Researches and Reviews*, 6(1), 77–86.
- Shyryaeva, T., & Trius, L. (2018). A call for cultural awareness and tolerance in higher education: The case of Pyatigorsk State University, North Caucasus, Russia. *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Sociala*, 43, 255–265.
- Sinicrope, C., Norris, J., & Watanabe, Y. (2007). Understanding and assessing intercultural competence: A summary of theory, research, and practice (Technical report for the foreign language program evaluation project). *Second Language Studies*, 26(1), 1–58.
- Son, G. (2018). Education assessments in secondary education in England. *New Library World*, 93(1104).
- Taher, H. (2016). *Tolerance in Islam*. Center for Foreign Languages and Specialised Translation.
- Verbitskaya, S. A. (2019). The model of education for developing the culture of tolerance in future specialists in the university environment. Research Result. *Pedagogy and Psychology of Education*, 5(1), 41–49.
- Watfa, A. (2005). *The Arabic language calls for tolerance in dealing with topics related to Arabic*. Maad Publishing House.
- Watfa, A., & Al-Majdel, A. (2008). *Educational and school sociology* (1st ed.). Maad Publishing House.

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution