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**EXPLORING STUDENTS' POLITICAL TOLERANCE THROUGH COGENERATIVE DIALOGUES:
BASIS FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIC PLAN**



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ABSTRACT

Political tolerance has been acknowledged for its role in creating and maintaining a safe space for learners, yet instances of intolerance leading to low academic engagement persist in schools. This action research explored the critical themes related to political tolerance within the context of an educational setting by employing cogenerative dialogues (cogens). 16 HUMSS students were purposively recruited and interviewed in the study, which resulted in the emergence of four main themes. The first theme is about students' tolerance on political viewpoints expressed in a respectful democratic discourse. Similarly, the second theme that emerged is also about their tolerance but on specified various viewpoints such as in progressive sentiments, liberal values, and sensitive and moderate views. Meanwhile the third theme talks about their limited tolerance for viewpoints rooted in misinformation, authoritarianism, one-sided gender-related perspectives, and the invalidation of others' viewpoints. The last theme that emerged is all about the potential for harnessing students' political tolerance to sustain their engagement in classes, emphasizing the role of respectful discussions, classroom culture, and effective strategies. The findings were used as a basis for crafting a cogens-based action plan aimed at enhancing the student engagement.

Keywords: *Political Tolerance, cogenerative dialogue, student engagement*

INTRODUCTION

Political tolerance is commonly defined as the willingness to accept and respect civil rights of persons and groups in society whose political views differ from one's

own. In the context of school environment, political tolerance plays an important role in creating and maintaining a safe space for learners (Benjamin et al., 2021). However, several reports suggest that an alarming trend of political intolerance such as hate

speech (UNESCO, 2021) and cancel culture (Schaus, 2022; Artiaga et al., 2022) is rising nowadays in different parts of the world. Although political intolerance is manifesting even in learning environment including schools, education is still looked at as a powerful means to prevent it. In fact, various global platforms believe that political intolerance should have no place in the classroom or in any place in society. For instance, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provides for the right of the child to education (Article 28) and obligates State Parties to respect and ensure the rights of each child without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's political or other opinion among others (Article 3). Similarly, the United Nations (UN) has launched a strategy and plan of action in 2018 against one of the manifestations of political intolerance which is hate speech. In the Philippines, the education department (Department of Education or DepEd) also promotes tolerance and acknowledges diversity of learners. As a matter of fact, DepEd expressed its support for the UN strategy and plan of action on hate speech. Additionally, it has adopted rights-based education (DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2022) wherein the right to respect and well-being in the learning environment is one of the dimensions. The framework pointed out that the education rights of children are not only confined to the right to access education and the right to quality education, but also to the rights in education which should be enjoyed, exercised, and inculcated among learners. As the 1987 Constitution prescribes, educational institutions shall foster love of humanity and respect for human rights (Article XIV, Section 3(2)). Moreover, DepEd believes that learners can reach their full potential when they are in an inclusive, accepting, and ensured of their rights as children learning environment.

Furthermore, one cannot deny that political tolerance is integrated across the curriculum most especially in civics-related and politics-related subjects in Philippine basic education. For instance, in one of senior high school subjects— Understanding Culture, Society, and Politics (UCSP) — learners are expected to gain better

appreciation of their rights and responsibilities as individuals and as members of the larger sociopolitical community to strengthen their civic competence as written on the curriculum guide. Remarking on rights and responsibilities, it was emphasized by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on their Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (1995), that tolerance is a moral duty and a responsibility of every individual in society and for the society. It can be expected that political tolerance will both play an important role in the process of learning the subject and emerge as one of the hidden outcomes of the subject. Political tolerance builds safe space and safe space encourages student engagement (Bramberger and Winter, 2021).

Despite the efforts of global and local communities as regards upholding political tolerance, problems regarding this continue to rise. Even in the classroom of the researcher of this study, political intolerance is becoming a problem as well. Many of his students were observed as becoming less engaged in class every time they feel that their political views are being invalidated by their classmates. The same problems were observed last school year especially during the heights of election season. Learners found themselves fighting and cancelling each other be it on their social media spaces or in learning environment. According to several studies, when students themselves are uncomfortable with their learning space (i.e., intimidated to other students or to other teachers who have a different political view), this can result into less student engagement and participation. Similarly, a study conducted by St. John and Briel (2017) pointed out that students are becoming more engaged if their voices are heard rather than invalidated, disregarded, or worse mocked. In politics-related classes like UCSP and Philippine Politics and Governance (PPG), it would not be possible for a student not to experience discomfort as the nature of these subjects meant to hear diverse and conflicting political views. But the thing is, this threatening scenario must be avoided, otherwise, learners might be less engaged in class and thus affect their academic

performance. In this light, it is hoped that through this action research the safe space, especially in the context of political tolerance, will be addressed.

The results of this action research were used as a basis for crafting a classroom-based action plan. As mentioned in the previous sections of this paper, political intolerance might affect student engagement. This study will employ cogenerative dialogues in exploring learners' perception, experience, and ideas as regards political tolerance. Cogenerative dialogues was defined by LaVan (2004) as cited in Levy (2021) as a form of structured discourse in which both teachers and learners will be engaged in a collaborative effort to identify problems and thus implement improvement in classroom teaching and learning practices. Cogenerative dialogues, also known as cogens, focus on listening to learner's voices and emphasize the values of respect, equity, and diversity (Roth, Tobin, and Zimmerman 2002 as cited in Hsu, 2021)—all are important values to political tolerance. Cogens indeed gives voice to learners especially to those who feel unheard in school setting. Aside from that, studies found that cogens could help students' academic performance, attendance, and well-being in schools (Tobin, 2008 as cited in Hsu, 2021). Also, cogenerative dialogue is used to create a safe environment to address emotional conflicts in classroom (Henderson et al., 2019). In addition, Hsu (2022) revealed in his study that cogens played an important role in sustaining student engagement. The action plan, which is a student engagement strategic plan, was crafted out of listening through the voices of the learners whom they themselves experience political tolerance from both sides of the spectrum. After all, schools are expected to focus more on making students feel respected and equally treated, and on giving young people the chance to participate in the schools' policy and organization to positively influence political tolerance among students.

METHODOLOGY

This study followed the action research cyclical approach by Kurt Lewin (1951).

According to Lewin as cited in Janse and Van Vliet (2021), action research is a cyclical process of change in which consists of “planning” where problem awareness takes places, “action” where new forms of behavior are tested and “results” where new behavior is reinforced and will become a habit over time.

The participants of this study were sixteen (16) learners purposively drawn from the 389 currently enrolled Grade 12 HUMSS learners in second semester S.Y. 2023-2024 at Binan Integrated National High School—the school where the researcher currently teaches UCSP. Qualitative studies require a minimum sample size of at least 12 to reach data saturation (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Fugard & Potts, 2014; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006 as cited in Vasileiou et al., 2018). To specifically determine the participants, three selection criteria was set: 1) currently enrolled in UCSP class; 2) has prior experiences as regards challenges related in manifesting political tolerance in school environment; and 3) willing to participate. Aside from these criteria, the researcher also made sure that the recruited participants were of different political views. This aspect will be executed to keep the idea of cogens, which is to give voice to diverse learners in classroom.

Using cogens as methodology, participants were given face-to-face orientation through an open discussion where they got the chance to exchange insights with others including the teacher-researcher himself. Thereafter, they are asked to be engaged in one-on-one online interview facilitated by the teacher-researcher. During the online session, learner-participants were given enough time to express their voices. Participants were reminded to uphold the values of respect as they express their opinions. Each participant was asked to write down their answers as regards their perceptions, ideas, any issues, or positive occurrences they had acquired, observed, and/or experience in their classroom, or any other relevant topics they would like to discuss. The data gathered through this phase were analyzed and interpreted afterwards. The results of data-gathering were used as the basis for crafting a

pedagogical tool, a cogens-based action plan (Student Engagement Strategic Plan) to be used by politics teachers to address the issue of political tolerance and student engagement.

The transcripts obtained from the sessions were written verbatim. Afterwards, the verbatim transcripts were thematically analyzed. To enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative findings member checking and triangulation were employed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In member checking, the verbatim transcript, thematic charts, and interpretation were sent to the participants for them to check if the interpretation is accurate and more of them rather than more of the teacher-researchers.

RESULTS

The themes emerged after following the procedure of data collection and careful thematic analysis. The emergent themes provided the answers in the research questions and are presented as follows:

Question 1. What political views are considered tolerable to the students?

- **Theme 1: Respectful Democratic Discourse**

Sub-Theme 1.1: Inclusive Discourse

... as long as acceptable political viewpoints are inclusive and sustain courteous environment where a range of viewpoints can be discussed and expressed without harming or discriminating against others, I find it tolerable (Participant 1).

...everyone's political view should be tolerable in the classroom, since classroom should be a safe space for everyone (Participant 5).

...as long as they respect each other's political diversity, and they don't make everyone believe or feel that their political views are better than the others (Participant 6).

Sub-Theme 1.2: Open-Mindedness to Democracy

This is the democracy in the classroom, in how all students that part in a classroom respects the outcome... (Participant 2)

I think that being an open minded and a student who respects everyone's political view should be tolerable in the classroom... (Participant 5)

From my opinion, every political views in my classroom are tolerable because each of us have our own stand. (Participant 11)

Sub-Theme 1.3: Ethical and Informed Discourse

...the way that if the leader has an idea about the development of the classroom, what the great means is saying it to the majority to know if its tolerable for them. (Participant 2)

... lahat ng students ay magkakaroon po ng kalayaan sa bawat bagay na gagawin nila. Subalit may patnubay parin po ito ng guro... dapat po tayo ay may morality and ethics... (Participant 13)

...reflected during our classroom meetings, where the class officials seek opinions and votes from our classmates when making decisions on various topics. (Participant 14)

Sub-Theme 1.4: Evidence-based Viewpoints

As long as the political views of my classmates and teachers are justifiable and backed up with facts (Participant 3)

people should check muna if the informations are reliable and true or not especially when you are criticizing politicians (Participant 4)

support their political views with factual evidences coming from reliable sources. (Participant 6)

- **Theme 2: Tolerance for Varied Political Views in Classroom**

Sub-Theme 2.1: Progressive Sentiments

... I find it agreeable when my peers are pro-advancement and pro-change that will benefit and improve our country. (Participant 1)

... kapag may nangki- criticize may pwedeng baguhin, may change and may improvement. so i think that's healthy. (Participant 4)

...dumaan na kasi tayo sa napakaraming opresyon pero nalagpasan natin lahat ng iyon dahil sa nasyonalismo kaya agree talaga ako kay Che Guevara kasi walang tao na dapat malupig... (Participant 10)

Sub-Theme 2.2: Liberal Values

Liberalism, in how all students or part of a school has a freedom of speech to express themselves in all situation. (Participant 2)

Liberalism po pa rin. Dahil po rito nagkakaroon po tayo ng kalayaan sa lahat ng aspeto po especially the freedom of speech po na talagang nagagamit at naisasagawang bawat isa to be more confident and heard. (Participant 13)

i think ang isa sa mga nakikita kong tolerable na political views ay ang pagiging isang liberalism... (Participant 7)

Sub-Theme 2.3: Sensitive and Moderation

...the way that if the leader has an idea about the development of the classroom, what the great means is saying it to the majority to know if its tolerable for them. (Participant 11)

...the way that if the leader has an idea about the development of the classroom, what the great means is saying it to the majority to know if its tolerable for them. (Participant 15)

Question 2. What political views are considered intolerable to the students?

- **Theme 3: Intolerable Political Views in Classroom**

Sub-Theme 3.1: Viewpoints taken from Misinformation Shared with Arrogance

When one of my classmates proudly stated their reasoning about why they support a certain politician but almost everything that comes out of their mouth are simply not true. This situation always irks whenever I remember it because they are spreading misinformation and act all arrogant about it. (Participant 1)

...someone talking about their stand with lack information often leading to misinformation. One time, we were talking about the heat of presidential election, I have this classmate of mine talking about their candidate. This classmate was dragging the other candidate just to justify how qualified their candidate was. (Participant 11)

Sub-Theme 3.2: Authoritarianism

...authoritarianism, this is uncomfortable because in our classroom when our leader become a leader using a coercive power, its like he/she controlling us for everything even if its litte that s/he doesn't even considerate to what we will feel and doesn't have empathy to its surrounding. (Participant 6)

I find it uncomfortable when a leader in a classroom is more of an authoritarian because it is less autonomous and it does not really give what the people need and want. (Participant 14)

Sub-Theme 3.3: One-Sided Gender-related Views

Feminism kasi po marami pong babae ang super judgemental po at being on sided everytime po mag uusap ng controversial na

bagay na involve po ang men at women. (Participant 13)

... 'yung paniniwala na mas kaya or mas better na manguna ang lalaki kesa sa babae. I also experienced being a leader in an organization once and most of the people belittle me and my abilities in leading. (Participant 4)

Sub-Theme 3.4: Invalidating Other Views

... pinagtawanan siya ng kabilang side... so naisip ko na mahirap maglabas ng political view mo kapag madaming mas vocal kesa sayo. (Participant 12)

... pinipili ko nalang manahimik kapag napapaligiran ako ng salungat sa aking pananaw (Participant 7)

... by degrading our view in politics and saying his/her is much better. (Participant 16)

Question 3. How can the student's political tolerance be used to sustain student engagement in UCSP class?

- **Theme 4: Enhancing Political Tolerance to Sustain Student Engagement**

Sub-Theme 4.1: Applying Political Tolerance in Discussions

... so having discussions and seeing their other classmates saying their views will help the students to think about their own views too. (Participant 4)

... having an open discussion would help us to engage and exchange different opinions from people, whether it is in favor or against with our views. We can have a healthy argument by giving an open floor for everyone to speak and stand about their political views. (Participant 5)

... opening discussions about political views really impacted me in my engagement in the class. It serves to me as eye opener that

everyone of us is different especially on the political views, I also learned how to respect the diversity towards the political beliefs and views of everyone. (Participant 6)

Sub-Theme 4.2: Applying Political Tolerance in Discussions

...when some talk about his political views then others accept and respect his perspective, everyone witnessed the reaction of each other, so they don't try to hide their perspective anymore but rather share it because they know that they won't be judge. (Participant 9)

The political tolerance that I consist today, big contribution of it was from our teachers in PPG. They helped me become a better political person and I can't thank them enough. Before, I used to insist my stand. As I grow out of it, I've learned that it takes political tolerance to create harmony without damaging the essence of exchanging knowledge and expressing opinions. (Participant 11)

...if the students have freedom to speak their political views without invalidating and criticizing them also if everyone will be tolerant or having political tolerance then there's a high possibility that every student will have the courage to engage or participate. (Participant 16)

Sub-Theme 4.3: Applying Political Tolerance in Discussions

We can also use interactive activities like role-plays, debates, or simulations to help people develop their critical thinking and empathy. (Participant 1)

To exercise our freedom of speech, academic debates could also be a thing because they could explain the pros and cons of political ideologies and give them the perspective of each ideology. (Participant 3)

...one time when we had our debate, we tried to prove our points but after that we opened our ears with other's opinions and points (Participant 8)

DISCUSSION

The themes and sub-themes emerged from cogenerative dialogues shed light on the complex dynamics of political tolerance and intolerance in the classroom, including the specific viewpoints and behaviors that students find tolerable and intolerable, and how it can be harnessed to sustain student engagement in classroom.

Theme 1 and Theme 2 provided insights as regards the viewpoints in classroom that are tolerable to students. According to the first theme, students are comfortable with political views expressed in such a respectful democratic manner. They believe that all political views should be tolerated if they are ethically and factually supported, and if the discourse is conducted in a manner that respects everyone's political diversity. This approach aligns with the principles of cogenerative dialogues and government mandates on safe spaces.

Theme 2 reveals that students in the classroom place a high value on progressive sentiments, liberal values, and sensitivity and moderation when it comes to political views. These findings suggest a complex understanding of political tolerance among the learners in the classroom, where diverse perspectives are respected and valued.

Theme 3 highlights the intolerable political views as per the students. The participants express frustration when their peers base their arguments on misinformation, highlighting the need for well-researched and accurate information in political discussions. Additionally, students find discomfort in the presence of authoritarian leadership that stifles open dialogue and lacks empathy, emphasizing the importance of inclusive leadership and open communication. Furthermore, they emphasize the need to avoid one-sided gender-related views and the invalidation of other viewpoints, advocating for discussions that respect various perspectives and promote respectful dialogue.

The discussion of these findings underscores the importance of promoting informed, respectful, and inclusive political discussions while addressing issues related to misinformation, authoritarian leadership, one-sided gender-related views, and the invalidation of other viewpoints.

Theme 4 provides insights into how political tolerance can be harnessed to sustain student engagement in the UCSP class. The findings suggest that respectful discussions, a culture of respect, and the use of classroom strategies play pivotal roles in this process. Students benefit from an environment where they can freely share their views, witness diverse perspectives, and engage in healthy arguments. Educators have a crucial role in cultivating a culture of respect that encourages students to accept and respect different viewpoints. Additionally, the integration of classroom strategies like role-plays, debates, and simulations helps students develop critical thinking and empathy, ultimately enhancing their political tolerance and engagement.

Based on the findings co-generated by the researcher and the participants who are the learners themselves, a cogens-based pedagogical action plan which aimed to enhance student engagement in UCSP (a politics-related class) was crafted. The culture of respect to political diversity, open dialogues, and inclusivity became the main features of the action plan.

In conclusion, these findings underscore the importance of creating a classroom environment that promotes political tolerance and respectful dialogue. Addressing challenges related to misinformation, authoritarian leadership, one-sided gender-related views, and the invalidation of other viewpoints is essential to create a safe and inclusive space for students to engage in political discussions. Moreover, fostering political tolerance can lead to sustained student engagement in subjects like UCSP, where open and informed discussions are encouraged.

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