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Pathways from Social Tolerance to Group Cohesion among Students in Higher Education: An Empirical Insights

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Abstract

Social tolerance and group cohesion are fundamental dimensions of social integration that contribute to inclusive and collaborative learning environments in higher education. This study explores the pathways through which social tolerance influences group cohesion among students by synthesizing existing empirical and theoretical evidence. A qualitative research design based on a systematic literature review was employed. Relevant studies were retrieved from reputable online databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. Following predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, selected publications were analyzed using structured data coding sheets and subjected to thematic analysis. The review indicates that social tolerance enhances mutual respect, trust, empathy, acceptance of diversity, and constructive interpersonal interactions, which collectively strengthen group cohesion and foster a sense of belonging among students. The findings further suggest that inclusive institutional policies, intercultural engagement, and collaborative learning experiences reinforce these relationships. The study concludes that promoting social tolerance is essential for developing cohesive student communities and improving educational outcomes. The review contributes to the sociological literature by providing empirical insights into the mechanisms linking social tolerance with group cohesion in higher education.

Keywords: Social Tolerance, Group Cohesion, Higher Education, Students, Social Integration, Sense of Belonging

Introduction

Higher education institutions are increasingly recognized as important social environments where students from diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds interact on a regular basis (Sarfraz, Shoaib, Kausar, &



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Abdullah, 2026; Shoaib, Nazir, & Rashid, 2026a; Shoaib, Nazir, & Sheraz, 2026a). These interactions provide valuable opportunities for developing social tolerance, which refers to individuals' willingness to accept (Nazir, Shoaib, & Mubeen, 2026; Shoaib, Nazir, & Sheraz, 2026b), respect, and peacefully coexist with people holding different identities, beliefs, values, and lifestyles (Nazir, Shoaib, & Bukhari, 2026; Shoaib, Nazir, & Mir, 2026). In an era characterized by globalization, increased mobility, and social diversity, fostering social tolerance has become a fundamental objective of higher education because it contributes to inclusive campus environments (Shoaib, Nazir, & Kausar, 2026; Shoaib, Nazir, & Rashid, 2026b), democratic citizenship, and sustainable social development (Nazir, Shoaib, & Kausar, 2026; Shoaib, Nazir, & Iqbal., 2026). A tolerant student community is more likely to demonstrate mutual respect, empathy, constructive dialogue (Nazir, Adnan, & Shoaib, 2026; Shoaib, Kausar, Sarfraz, & Abdullah, 2026b), and collaborative engagement, thereby reducing prejudice, discrimination, and interpersonal conflicts (Sarfraz, Kausar, Shoaib, & Abdullah, 2026; Shoaib, Sarfraz, & Kausar, 2026). Consequently, social tolerance has emerged as a significant sociological construct that shapes the quality of interpersonal relationships and collective functioning within educational institutions (Shoaib, Kausar, Sarfraz, & Abdullah, 2026c; Shoaib, Sarfraz, Kausar, & Abdullah, 2026a).

Group cohesion has been found as the strength of interpersonal bonds, shared identity, trust, and commitment among group members (Shoaib, Kausar, Sarfraz, & Abdullah, 2026a; Shoaib, Sarfraz, Kausar, & Abdullah, 2026b), represents another essential dimension of student life that influences academic collaboration, psychological well-being, and institutional engagement (Sarfraz, Sheraz, Shoaib, & Abdullah, 2026; Sarfraz, Shoaib, & Sheraz, 2026b). Whereas previous research has independently examined social tolerance and group cohesion (Sarfraz, Shoaib, & Sheraz, 2026a; Shoaib, Shamraiz, Abbas, & Abdullah, 2026), relatively limited empirical attention has been given to understanding the mechanisms through which social tolerance contributes to cohesive student groups within higher education settings (Shoaib, Abbas, Shamraiz, & Abdullah, 2026; Shoaib, Ali, Hassan, & Abdullah, 2026). Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the pathways from social tolerance to group cohesion among students by providing empirical insights into the relational processes that connect these constructs. By examining how tolerance-based attitudes facilitate trust, mutual acceptance, cooperation, and a sense of belonging, the study contributes to the sociological understanding of group formation and social integration in higher education. The findings are expected to offer both theoretical and practical implications for educators, policymakers, and university administrators seeking to strengthen inclusive campus cultures and enhance collective student engagement.

Data and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design based on a systematic literature review to examine the pathways between social tolerance and group cohesion among students in higher education. Rather than collecting primary data, the study synthesized existing empirical and theoretical evidence from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and research reports retrieved from reputable online databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. Relevant studies were identified using predefined search terms such as *social tolerance*, *group cohesion*, *higher education*, *students*, *social inclusion*, and *intergroup relations*. A systematic screening process was undertaken to ensure the inclusion of high-quality and relevant studies. Eligible publications were selected based on predefined



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inclusion and exclusion criteria, considering their relevance to the research objectives, methodological rigor, and publication quality. The selected studies were then analyzed using structured data coding sheets developed to extract information on research context, theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, key variables, and principal findings. The coded data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, conceptual relationships, and emerging themes concerning social tolerance and group cohesion. The findings were synthesized through comparative analysis, enabling the identification of significant pathways linking the two constructs. Finally, the discussion integrated the reviewed evidence to provide empirical insights, and conclusions were drawn regarding the theoretical and practical implications for fostering socially cohesive environments within higher education institutions.

Results and Discussion

The existing body of literature had provided insights on social tolerance and group cohesion that policies related to intellectual ethics strengthened trust among students and encouraged equality in higher education in developed and developing countries (Ahmed, 2020; Troiani & Ewing, 2019; Wijaya, 2019). In the same way, the study findings asserted that interactions in small groups produced secure environments for exchanging thoughts and fostering respect among students at territory level (Basharpour, 2020). Uniformly, the analysis of the study revealed that social tolerance in educational sectors fostered respect among various students and increased group cohesion, also it had been developing understanding, empathy, communication, shared objectives, and inclusive practices within academic settings (Bibi, 2020). Corresponding, the result of the study pointed out that social tolerance was a path for students from diverse backgrounds to worked well together and developed trust via respect for one another, shared experiences, and open-minded communication techniques on a daily basis, it was necessary to group cohesiveness at university level (Bjarnason, 2020). In similar fashion, the argument of the study clinched that universities promoted social tolerance by adopted inclusive policies, variety of educational programs, and encouraged settings, it motivated students to value diversity and collaborated toward shared academic and societal success in educational institutions (Brasher, 2020). Specifically, the study findings indicated that social tolerance was followed and students learnt how to understood viewpoints, values, and customs of other culture that was differ from their own, cultural diversity had a good impact on group cohesion in higher education (Brenner, 2020). For instance, the conclusion of the study mentioned that lack of social tolerance might have destroyed group cohesiveness, caused to problems, miscommunications (Ali, Shoaib, Shamraiz, & Abdullah, 2026; Shoaib, Noor, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026), and less cooperation between students from diverse social, cultural, and academic backgrounds in higher academia settings (Farkac, 2020). Moreover, the study found that effective leadership in universities played a critical role in fostered social tolerance and enhanced group cohesion by practiced polite behavior and supported inclusive involvement in academic and extracurricular activities at territory level (Gellera, 2020). Furthermore, the argument of researcher conveyed that social tolerance and group cohesiveness had significantly impacted by communication skills for students those listened carefully and expressed ideas clearly were more likely to developed strong productive connections in academia settings (Golebiowska, 2020). Moreover, the study reported that group interaction in universities fostered social tolerance by exposed students to a range of perspectives, it also strengthened relationships within academic groups and developed solidarity at educational institutions (Karmaliani, 2020).



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The literature conducted the understandings that inclusive classroom settings supported group cohesion through encouraged social tolerance and ensured every student felt appreciated, respected, and motivated to take part in activities at higher educational institutions in *Global South* and *Global North* (Kyere, 2020; Maurer, 2020; Robinson, 2020). In the same way, the study findings asserted that social tolerance promoted teamwork by helped students to accepted differences, settled issues respectfully, and worked well together on group projects and research projects in academic settings (Wang, 2020). Uniformly, the analysis of the study revealed that social tolerance and group cohesion among students were greatly enhanced by institutional policies, it was supported equality as well as diversity at territory level (Wang, 2020). Corresponding, the result of the study pointed out that social tolerance was significantly impacted by faculty attitudes toward diversity as supportive teachers fostered inclusive debates and promoted settings (Shoaib, Shamraiz, Noor, & Abdullah, 2026; Shoaib, Srosh, Mobeen, & Abdullah, 2026a), it supported group cohesion among students at university level (Yu, 2020). In similar fashion, the argument of the study clinched that student organizations promoted social tolerance by connected students from different backgrounds to work on common interests and objectives, it fostered solidarity among groups in educational settings (Zhou, 2020). Specifically, the study findings indicated that social tolerance was significantly influenced by emotional intelligence for students those were able to understood and control their emotions were better able to maintained positive relationships and cohesive groups in academia settings (Abdullah & Shoaib, 2021; Shoaib & Abdullah, 2021; Shoaib, Srosh, Mobeen, & Abdullah, 2026b). For instance, the conclusion of the study mentioned that language limitations might affected social tolerance and group cohesiveness by caused misconceptions unless institutions encouraged various students in communicated effectively at higher education institutions (Bartosh, 2021). Moreover, the study found that respect for cultural differences improved social tolerance and strengthened group cohesion by empowered students to learn from one another and valued other viewpoints at territory level (Guohao, 2021). Furthermore, the argument of researcher conveyed that group activities and collaborative learning strategies encouraged social tolerance by strengthened students to interact with classmates from diverse backgrounds and worked for mutual goals at university level (Shoaib, Shamraiz, Baneen, & Abdullah, 2026a, 2026c, 2026d). Moreover, the study reported that conflict resolution techniques were crucial for maintained social tolerance and group cohesiveness as it empowered students to resolved conflicts peacefully and fostered healthy connections among groups in educational settings (Justwan & Fisher, 2021).

The present body of literature has asserted insights that a positive campus environment promoted social tolerance, it had been fostering an atmosphere where students feel protected, respected, and inspired to made cohesive and cooperative connections among groups at higher education in developed and developing countries (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Baneen, 2026a; Shoaib, Iqbal, Baneen, & Abdullah, 2026c; Shoaib, Shamraiz, Baneen, & Abdullah, 2026b). In the same way, the study findings asserted that experiences across cultures in academia settings improved social tolerance and group cohesion by exposed students to a variety of viewpoints and fostered understanding among students at the university (Shrikant, 2021). Uniformly, the analysis of the study revealed that social tolerance fostered academic collaboration as students those valued diversity was better able to exchanged ideas and helped the group succeed in educational settings (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Baneen, 2026b; Shoaib, Iqbal, Baneen, & Abdullah, 2026a, 2026b). Corresponding, the result of the study pointed out that students have frequently expressed



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social tolerance as well as respect in their academic and social relationships in order to developed the trust, it was vital to group cohesion at territory level (Tamim, 2021). In similar fashion, the argument of the study clinched that social tolerance promoted inclusivity by provided equal possibilities for involvement and achievement for all students, despite their background in academia settings (Larijani, Shoaib, & Abedi, 2026; Shoaib, Shamraiz, Abdullah, & Shahzadi, 2026a, 2026b). Specifically, the study findings indicated that diversity in education improved learning opportunities and developed social tolerance, both of these improved group cohesion among students in the university (Hartmann, 2022). For instance, the conclusion of the study mentioned that open communication in the classroom promoted social tolerance and improved group cohesion by helped students to politely share their thoughts and learnt from other students in higher education (Karim, 2022). Moreover, the study found that maintained strong group cohesion and fostered social tolerance depend heavily on institutional support for diversity programs at territory level (Kirsten, 2022). Furthermore, the argument of researcher conveyed that social tolerance decreased discrimination and fostered a more integrated atmosphere where students worked together without concern about being left out in educational settings (McBeth, 2022). Moreover, the study reported that understood cultural norms helped students manage relationships in a polite manner, it promoted social tolerance and group cohesion among students in academia settings (Olaniyan, 2022).

Several studies have provided insights on social tolerance and group cohesion among students in higher education in *Global South* and *Global North* (Shamraiz, Shoaib, Baneen, & Shahzadi, 2026a, 2026b; Shoaib, Shahzadi, & Abdullah, 2026; Shoaib & Ullah, 2026). In the same way, the study findings asserted that students from different backgrounds had worked together happily to appreciate one another's different cultural viewpoints through social tolerance in higher education (Rashid, 2023). Uniformly, the analysis of the study revealed that students had experienced similar academic difficulties and develop mutual trust were more cohesive as a group at territory level (Shoaib, Shahzadi, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026; Shoaib, Shahzadi, Shamraiz, & Abdullah, 2026a, 2026b). Corresponding, the result of the study pointed out that institutions had used multicultural campus events, conversation of the students, and workshops to promoted tolerant mindsets in the university (Olaniyan, 2022). In similar fashion, the argument of the study clinched that the capacity of students to interact successfully in a variety of group environments and developed empathy was significantly influenced by faculty support at territory level (Karim, 2022). Specifically, the study findings indicated that fair participation in group projects had increased the student's self-esteem, trust, solidarity, and broad level of involvement in higher education (Shoaib, Ahmed, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026; Shoaib, Ali, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Iqbal, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2026; Shoaib, Shahzadi, Shamraiz, & Abdullah, 2026c). For instance, the conclusion of the study mentioned that efforts had provided by students encouraged kindness and honesty among academic communities and between other social groups at territory level (Vertelyte, 2021). Moreover, the study found that language diversity had helped multicultural students' comfortable social and academic integration in higher education (Tamim, 2021). Furthermore, the argument of researcher conveyed that diversity in groups had offered students to a variety of ideas and life experiences, fostering critical thinking among students in the social settings (Starkey, 2021). Moreover, the study reported that training in decreased prejudice, improved learning of students as well as group identities and had helped students in removing stereotypes in the university (Shrikant, 2021).



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Literature has asserted insights on social tolerance and group cohesion among students in higher education in developed and developing countries (Ali, Abdullah, & Shaoib, 2026; Ali, Abdullah, & Shoaib, 2026; Shoaib & Abdullah, 2025; Shoaib, Waris, Iqbal, & Abdullah, 2025). In the same way, the study findings asserted that students from marginalized backgrounds had developed more cohesive and overcome inequalities as equal opportunity policies have been set in educational institutions (Ekaju, 2014). Uniformly, the analysis of the study revealed that responsible students had provided a beneficial impact to the social culture of universities to developed solidarity, cohesiveness, tolerance, and equality among groups at territory level (Blum, 2014). Corresponding, the result of the study pointed out that students had urged to work together, have a greater awareness of one another's skills by group tasks, developed cohesiveness and social tolerance in the university (Shoaib, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2025; Shoaib, Rasool, & Zaman, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Shoaib, Rasool, Zaman, & Abdullah, 2025). In similar fashion, the argument of the study clinched that educational institutions had supported intercultural learning, developed tolerance in students by combined students with common passions and aims in the social settings (Yuen, 2013). Specifically, the study findings indicated that social tolerance had encouraged by inclusive classroom practices and promoted fair involvement of all student from diverse backgrounds in higher education (Wilkins, 2013). For instance, the conclusion of the study mentioned that multiculturalism groups had suffer and social tolerance declined when discrimination happened due to cross-cultural variations within student organizations in educational institutions (Kormi, 2013). Moreover, the study found that tolerance and critical thinking among various academic groups had developed by polite criticism in talks in the social settings (Holden, 2013). Furthermore, the argument of researcher conveyed that group mentorship programs had coordinated with students from diverse educational and cultural communities to developed group cohesion at territory level (Shoaib, 2025a, 2025b; Shoaib, Ahmed, & Usmani, 2025a, 2025b; Shoaib, Kausar, Ali, & Abdullah, 2025). Moreover, the study reported that racial and economic disparities had limited the ability of students from different financial backgrounds to connected and impact involvement among groups in the university (West, 2011).

Several studies have provided insights on social tolerance and group cohesion among students in higher education in developed and developing countries (Altinoglu, 2018; Ferlier, 2020; Thomas, 2022). In the same way, the study findings asserted that students had learned to be more understanding and accepting of other ideologies, ways of life when teachers promoted equality among groups in the university (McBeth, 2022). Uniformly, the analysis of the study revealed that disparities among students and an overall decreased in campus unity had result from unfair professors or management in educational institutions (Kratovic, 2021). Corresponding, the result of the study pointed out that students had developed a broader understanding of the multiculturalism and removed their prejudices toward other culture among groups in the social settings (Shoaib, 2023c, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e; Shoaib & Ullah, 2021). In similar fashion, the argument of the study clinched that tolerance and trust of the students had fostered by educational systems promoted justice and equal opportunities among groups at territory level (Farkac, 2020). Specifically, the study findings indicated that students had participated in intercultural programs due to these demolished assumptions and enhanced perspectives in developed tolerance and group cohesiveness among students in higher education (Bjarnason, 2020). For instance, the conclusion of the study mentioned that discrimination and prejudice between students due to cultural variations had decreased social tolerance and solidarity in the social settings (Basharpoor, 2020). Moreover, the



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study found that educational institutions leadership programs had involved community-based activities to promote values like sympathy, honesty, and respect among students in the university (Shoaib, 2021, 2023a, 2023b, 2024a). Furthermore, the argument of researcher conveyed that participation in decision-making by students had developed a sense of solidarity and responsibility among groups (Korol, 2017). Moreover, the study reported that policies at universities had protected the opinions of intercultural groups and guarantee to them all students feel comfortable and appreciated with sense of cohesiveness at territory level (Hook, 2017).

The literature conducted the understandings on social tolerance and group cohesion that students from a variety of backgrounds were encouraged to respect and accept one another in higher education in developed and developing countries (Liu, 2014; Omer, 2014; Raihani, 2014). In the same way, the study findings asserted that learning outcomes among fields was improved and cooperation in learning fostered by group cohesion at universities (Shi, 2014). Uniformly, the analysis of the study revealed that faculty leadership decreased discrimination and promoted tolerant behaviors among groups in academic settings (Sturgis, 2014). Corresponding, the result of the study pointed out that cultural diversity increased understanding between various social groups and improved conversations among students in class at territory level (Alexseev, 2015). In similar fashion, the argument of the study clinched that transparency in leadership promoted solidarity and enhanced trust among students from different cultures in educational institutions (Bilgili, 2015). Specifically, the study findings indicated that student organizations improved collaboration among groups and provided possibilities for interaction between different cultures in higher education (Brian, 2015). For instance, the conclusion of the study mentioned that expertise in communicating strengthened understanding and decreased conflict among groups at territory level (Colic, 2015). Moreover, the study found that events on campus promoted diversity and fostered respect among various cultural identities in academic settings (Garretson, 2015). Furthermore, the argument of researcher conveyed that relationships between groups of students and collaboration were often impacted by group cohesion in educational institutions (Huggins & Debies, 2015). Moreover, the study reported that support programs reduced unfair treatment problems among students and enhanced the peaceful environment on campus (Majid, 2015).

Theoretical Review

Biological Proponents: Biological proponents highlighted social acceptance and unity through nature, placing a strong emphasis on evolutionary, neurological, and inherited factors. They claimed that to survive, students were forced by their biology to join together, sympathize, and collaborate (Janmaat, 2012). As mirror neurons foster empathy, they have been promoting unity and reducing conflict in social settings. Hormones such as oxytocin strengthen bonds and trust.

Psychological Theories: The primary goal of the psychological concepts related to social tolerance and group cohesion is to understand the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the individual. Social identity, empathy, and perspective-taking had some ideas that improved awareness and reduced bias (Sturgis, 2014). As constructive interaction among groups promoted tolerance, cognitive dissonance theory explained attitude changes. Respect for one another and common objectives developed fair group dynamics and cohesion among students.



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Psychosocial Determinants: Empathy, self-worth, social identity, and cognitive flexibility were psychological aspects that influenced tolerance in society and group cohesiveness. These elements affected views of the students and connected them to other students (Peisker & Robertson, 2015). As shared identity and trust improved group cohesion, high levels of emotional intelligence, willingness to vary, and positive previous involvement with various groups improved tolerance.

Sociological Aspects: Norms, values, culture, and methods of socialization were sociological aspects of social acceptance and unity within groups. Ideas regarding diversity were shaped by institutions that included the media, school, and family (Duru, Hanquinet, & Cesur, 2017). Group participation had an impact on inclusion and exclusion. In a variety of social contexts, fair interactions, mutual obligations, and common objectives encouraged tolerance and cohesiveness.

Structuralism Paradigm: According to the structuralism paradigm, social cohesiveness and acceptance were outcomes of basic social systems and structures. It highlighted how institutions, language, and social customs impacted students as well as group dynamics (Raw, Sherry, & Rowe, 2022). As organized interactions affected tolerance and appreciation within cultures, social roles and collective ideas provided traditions that promoted cohesiveness.

Conclusion

This study concludes that social tolerance serves as a fundamental foundation for strengthening group cohesion among students in higher education. The systematic review of the literature demonstrates that tolerance promotes mutual respect, acceptance of diversity, trust, empathy, and constructive interpersonal interactions, all of which contribute to stronger social bonds and a greater sense of belonging within student groups. The findings further indicate that cohesive student groups are more likely to engage in collaborative learning, effective communication, conflict resolution, and inclusive participation, thereby enhancing both academic and social outcomes. The qualitative synthesis also highlights that higher education institutions play a critical role in cultivating tolerant attitudes through inclusive policies, intercultural learning opportunities, and supportive campus environments. Overall, the study provides empirical insights into the pathways linking social tolerance and group cohesion and emphasizes the importance of promoting inclusive educational practices. Future research may employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to validate these relationships across diverse institutional and cultural contexts.

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