



## Tehran University Students' Perception of Informal Interactions

Mojgan Khoshnam<sup>1</sup>, Masoud Kousari<sup>2</sup>, Maghsoud Farasatkah<sup>3</sup>

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### Extended Abstract

Students have interactions and communications beyond the official university systems which are informal and form many of their memories during the time of education. What matters is the students' understanding and perception of mental concepts of student life which should be discovered to narrow the gap between higher education and university officials as much as possible so that the hidden layers of student life can be perceived and policies can be formed according to them. In the present study, a summary of the perceived, meaning and experienced student's life will be presented during these interactions. For this purpose, deep phenomenological interviews were made with 52 students from different departments and fields of study in the University of Tehran. Over the informal interactions and spending most of their times with their friends, the students have changed in many cases of their student life such as changing in human communication patterns, changing religious styles, changing the leisure time, an improvement in personal abilities, gender attitudes, changing in educational patterns, changing of attitude and worldview, achieving positive personal feelings, support and a sense of group affiliation, compensation, changing in social participation motivations, change in the socializing processes and the normative system.

*Keywords:* world universe, student, informal interaction, phenomenology

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1. PhD Student in Sociology of Culture, Institute for Social and Cultural Studies, Ministry of Science, Tehran, Iran (Corresponding Author).

✉ [m.khoshnam.p85@gmail.com](mailto:m.khoshnam.p85@gmail.com)

2. Associate Professor, Department of Social Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tehran University, Tehran, Iran.

✉ [mkousari@ut.ac.ir](mailto:mkousari@ut.ac.ir)

3. Associate Professor, Department of Planning in Higher Education, Institute for Research and Planning in Higher Education, Tehran, Iran.

✉ [maghsoodf@gmail.com](mailto:maghsoodf@gmail.com)



## INTRODUCTION

Student life has a world of life which cannot be covered just by the formal systems of the educational programs of universities (Ferasatkah, 2013). The students have communications and interactions beyond the classroom and formal system of the universities which have not been paid attention usually. These interactions are of different kinds and sometimes, they have useful and practical aspects for students' education period while they are sometimes damaging. However, what is important is the students' understanding and perception of the mind concepts of this interaction during the education years.

## PURPOSE

This article is aimed at achieving the mind concept of the students of Tehran University about their informal student interactions.

## METHODOLOGY

In this research, the qualitative method based on phenomenological approach was applied and in the interviews, the semi-structured questions were used. 52 interviews were done with the students of Tehran University with the observance of the variety of the students from different faculties including technical and engineering, social sciences, fine arts, management, literature and humanities, basic sciences, law, and political sciences, and regarding the girl and boy students, the students residing in Tehran and the students living in the dorm, their physical styles, life styles, and religious and non-religious personalities and beliefs. Among them, 29 people were boys and 23 people were girls. 29 people were from Tehran and 23 people were other cities who lived in the dormitory or at home.

## RESULT

The information obtained from the interviews regarding "the individuals' experiences" of the mentioned phenomenon (students' informal interactions) were categorized and divided into 10 meaning units that are presented in table 1.

Table (1). *Semantic clusters and content obtained from the interviews*

No	Semantic clusters	Themes
1	Improving <i>individual skills</i>	Earning interactive skills
		Flexibility
		The acquisition of critical thinking
		Ability to solve problems
		The acquisition of cultural understanding
		Responsibility
		Earning applied skills
		Earning occupational skills
		Increasing ideas and creativity

No	Semantic clusters	Themes	
2	Gender Attitude	Positive attitude	
		Negative attitude	
		Marriage	
3	Student Lifestyle Change	Changing the pattern of human communications	Development of job communications
			Close interactions with professors
			Interacting with both people Bastard
			Escape from isolation and loneliness
			New friendships
			Negative communication behaviors
		Change in the religiosity style	Strengthening or maintaining religious beliefs
			Reducing religious beliefs
			Tolerance and acceptance of different beliefs
		Change in the leisure pattern	Fun and fun
			wasting time
4	Change in the academic pattern	Hurt the lesson	
		Facilitating learning	
		More useful than classroom - hidden learning	
5	Change in the worldview and attitude	Exchange of thoughts	
		Knowledge diversification	
		Effectiveness	
6	Change in motivation for social participation	Organizational activity	
		The sharing of cultural goods and services	
		Philanthropy activity	
7	Individual positive sense	Sense of confidence	
		Sense of being usefulness and effective	
		Sense of independence and individual self -efficacy	
		Puberty and individual growth	
		Sense of dynamism	
		Motivation for success	
8	Group support and affiliation	Consultation	
		Protection	
		Group affiliation	
		Identification	
		Comfort and intimacy	
		Mutual understanding	
		Lack of affiliation	
9	Compensation	Improving and fixing the shortcomings in the official system	
		Escape from the university's official system	
		Stylized official university space	
10	Change in the process of socialization and normative system	Earning experiences	
		Breaking the norm	



Iranian Cultural Research

Abstract



The students expressed their experiences about interaction with their friends at the university, their emotions, motivations, effects and influences, and forming friend groups, and so they helped us find out their perceived mind concept through these informal interactions with friends. After reduction, coding, and analyzing the findings of the interviews, we achieved the changed pattern of student life.

## CONCLUSION

Some students considered the student interactions as a harming factor for their education, and many students believed that their progress in education and learning owes to their wide communications with other students; Group and participatory studying, explaining the lesson contents that have not been understood in the class, consulting with the senior students about the ways of getting score from the professors, writing summaries of books, and getting help for easier entrance to master's degree program. Sometimes, the students consider their friend interactions better and more useful than the classroom and they acquire skills and abilities which are not regarded in the formal curriculum.

The students believe that it is better not to do anything about each other's religious beliefs and take advantage from their other common ideas and beliefs. In order to express this concept, they use phrases such as "having constructive tolerance", "reducing past prejudices", "respecting others' personal beliefs", and "mutual understanding of each other".

Most of the students who talked about the meaning of expansion of business communication through membership in student groups were the students of art and social sciences. Expressions such as "supporting each other", "the necessity of existence of a support network", "everything is based on relationships" indicate the importance of this concept for the students. Regarding the mentioned concepts about the formation of business communications, it can be found that the students are not so hopeful of being employed after getting educated from the University of Tehran.

There are gender, class, and other discriminatory viewpoints among some of the participants. In some groups, the boys have racist proud viewpoints and they believe that the girls should not enter their group. Also, there class discriminatory view among some of the respondents. For example, a student believes that only the people residing at the southern region of Tehran have the right to enter their friend group, and otherwise, their concerns, behaviors, and deeds will be unacceptable for them.

This kind of viewpoint was also observed among some students from Tehran and other cities.

A larger group of the students' mind meaning about membership in friend groups was mainly having fun, recreation, hanging around with the friends, going

to the restaurants and parks, travelling, going to the movies and party rather than acquiring personal skills and abilities such as critical thinking, problem solving, cultural understanding, raising creativity, developing ideas, etc.

A number of students try to amend the university deficiencies in the informal areas. On one hand, they want to make their student life fine and on the other hand, they want to escape from the formal system of the university and its monitoring. Expressing dissatisfaction with the formal and educational atmosphere of the university, they are trying to get away from it and spend their time in informal interactions in the university.

### NOVELTY

Since few studies have investigated the students' mind concept in informal interactions, studying this issue by methodological method is an innovation in this article. At the large scale, more knowledge and information of the higher education institutes and universities about the informal environment of the universities will lead to the adoption of more strategic policies. Also at the small scale, through recognition of these meanings and concepts in the educational planning, the faculties and scientific groups can make an effort to generalize the positive meanings acquired by the students through group interaction to the formal policies, increasing the attractiveness of university studies, and filling the existing gaps.



Iranian Cultural Research

Abstract

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Iranian Cultural Research

Abstract

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