# Politeness and Peace Language: Iraqi Faculty Members' and Postgraduate Students' Perspectives

Ali Salah[1,] MinahHarun[2]

[1](Ph.D. candidate, Department of Language Studies, School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy, Universiti Utara Malaysia)
[2](Senior lecturer, Department of Language Studies, School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy, Universiti Utara Malaysia)
Correspondence author: Ali Salah

**Abstract:** The paper explores the need for politeness and particular language that promotes peace in daily communication. More particularly, the paper explores how Iraqi individuals who had encountered war share their insights into the factors that increase peace.Such polite rhetoric represents their inner serenity in the willingness to have a harmonious situation. The paper posits that people need to empower themselves to embrace peace and politeness language in daily interaction and avoid harmful utterances, in particular, when facing war situations.By exploring Iraqis' discourse, much can be learned about positive factors, attitudes, and utterances that construct peace. Drawing input from the in-depth interviews with fifteen male Iraqi individuals, the paper reveals the harmony sentiments and peace rhetoric in the interaction despite having encountered war in their country. Data were analysed using a discourse analytical approach. The results disclose varied factors the respondents use to frame their insights into the need for peace language in human communication.
**Keywords:** Peace language, politeness, rhetoric, in-depth interviews, Iraq.

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

## I.   INTRODUCTION

This paper explores peace and the language used that relates to peace through the narratives of individuals who encountered war. These individuals are Iraqi men whose perspectives are considered useful as they have witnessed crises and war in their own country whilst at the same time have to fend for the families for a better living environment. Questions that we ought to pursue in today's world include what can be done to create a peaceful world, and how to embrace harmonious interactions regardless of religious beliefs and ideologies. We argue that such pertinent questions can be explored through understanding individuals' narratives.

Nelson (2014) defined the concept '*peaceful personality*' as "a characteristic of an individual involving the consistent manifestation of peaceful states, attitudes, and behaviors over time and across relevant contextual domains" (p. 7). Therefore, to understand how to create inner personal peace, harmonious interactions and "personal peacefulness" among people, we need to improve the positive global peace language-in-use (Wahyuningsih, 2016). The term "personal peacefulness" refers to the individual's inner serenity, well-being, intrapersonal peace language, intimate communication, as well as the peaceful behavior towards other groups, in particular, in social construction of individuals' interactions (Sims, Nelson, & Puopolo, 2014). It can enhance concord or escalate dispute in interpersonal relations. In this regard, peace rhetoric is a medium of decent coexistence and civil behavior.

There is a growing body of studies dealing with the multi-dimensional characteristics of peace. However, not much is explored in making sense of the linguistic features of peace for people to resonate with, especially in making sense of interethnic communication in multicultural context (MinahHarun, 2007). The peace language concerns 'sensemaking' to echo Weick (1979) in terms of making something sensible for better understanding of human interaction. What is cordial to one individual might be viewed as frosty to another. Hence, peace language as global educational rhetoric can create goodwill and harmony among ethnically diverse people in their daily social communication (Nipkow, 2018).

Friedrich (2007) posited that an emphasis on peace language rather than on quarrel utterances is much-needed to promote ideally linguistic peace in a world. Gomes de Matos (2000) further pointed out that the function of language in the process of peace restoration (in cases of war rhetoric in addition to warfare in general) seems like an ideal solution for peaceful interaction and polite rhetoric in society. This tends to concur with Blue and Harun's (2003)notion of hospitality language between hosts and guests that emphasises the

---

importance of 'polite language' in achieving the desired goals be it for social or commercial purposes. Meanwhile, Wahyuningsih (2016) claimed that peaceful thought is the corner stone to promote the national unity against the racism and fanaticism in any community. Such language is capable of producing a positive peaceful behaviour for individuals who have tragic memories (Dedaic & Nelson, 2012; Ntlama, 2017).

In Iraq, for instance, peace language seems to be lacking given the episodes of forced migration and terrorism. Such absence of harmonious communication among sects might be due to the continuous internal violence, lack of security, social injustice, and war. Furthermore, the Iraqi nation has had to encounter series of offensive attacks that impact their peaceful communication (Al-Khalidi & Tanner, 2006; Cordesman, 2004). Although studies have discussed the war situations and negative rhetoric in Iraq (Al-Khalidi & Tanner, 2006; Belloni, 2001; Goretti, 2007; Morgan & Vandrick, 2009; Obono & Onyechi, 2017; Orjuela, 2003), not much have been explored on the factors that denote the inner peaceful personality of lay persons.

## II.     DEFINING PEACE AND VIOLENCE

The impact of 'violence' and 'peace' language has always been the substantial matter in the field of social and international relationships (Gleditsch, Nordkvelle, & Strand, 2014). The present paper will not dwell on the core consequences of violence and the community's preoccupation with cruelty. Rather, we devoted our attention to the understanding of and insights into the nature and thinking of the affected individuals, who do not seem to live in peace in their home environments. They have the desire to resolve complex conflicts that they witnessed as is the case of Iraqis and are more willing than ever to experience peace. We believe that personal inner peace in daily communication and relationships is crucial for people's healthy well-being. Many studies have highlighted that peace utterance and positive inner peace entails positive interaction of individuals (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005).

Sheldon and Kasser (1995)had shared that inner peace is closely related to the positive tendencies of personality, peaceful communication and even the physical health. Some studies posit that inner peacefulness represents happiness and positive attitudesthat increase social coherence(Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007).
Peace is having simply a sensation of safety, good will, harmony, and restfulness (Grewal & Kapri, 2015; Saxena, Kumar & Aggarwal, 2011). Oxford (2013) defined peace as "… any form of communication-verbal or non-verbal that describes, reflects, expresses, or actively expands peace" (p. 3). Ugoji (2017) defined violence as "absolute lack of peace" (p. 88). Hence, peace is more than merely sitting in quietness or absence of conflicts. It is a state of peace of mind. The peacefulness attitudes of individuals can, therefore, influence whether individuals engage in war-promoting or peace-promoting utterances (Sims et al., 2014).
Given the significance of peace and attention to personal inner peace within the person, the present paper seeks to explore the polite and peace language as well as the factors that indicate harmony from the lens of the Iraqi male individuals in a Malaysian university. The following research questions (RQ) were formulated:
RQ1: How do Iraqis view peace based on the conflicts in the home country?
RQ2: What are the factors that they believe hinder peace in Iraq?

## III.     METHODOLOGY
### 3.1     Participants
The respondents were Iraqis comprising two academic staff members (visiting lecturers) and thirteen postgraduate male students studying in a public Malaysian university. The study used a purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (i) All the respondents have experienced some tragedy during the war in Iraq; (ii) Most of them have been displaced within the country; (iii) They are able to articulate their tragedy freely; and (iv) They are considered mature enough to express their opinions and share their stories as academicians and postgraduate students (Jadav & Suvera, 2014). Pseudonyms were used to represent the respondents. The respondents participated in the face-to-face in-depth interviews with the first author which were held at different days and venues. The following profile shares the background information of the respondents including the nature of tragedy, academic programme, year, city, and age, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

**Table 1**
*Participants' Profile (Faculty Members)*

| Participant (P) | Nature of Tragedy | Academic Programme Enrolled | Year of Working | City | Age |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **P1** | Lost prosperity | Visiting Senior Lecturer/UUM | 3 years | Samarra | 42 |
| **P2** | Lost relatives | Visiting Senior Lecturer/UUM | 2 years | Fallujah | 43 |

Source: First Author's Research Data (2018).

**Table 2**
*Participants' Profile (Postgraduate Students)*

| Participant (P) | Nature of Tragedy | Academic Programme Enrolled | Current Year of Study/Months | City | Age |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **P3** | Lost brother | Ph.D./Law | 4th year | Mosul | 45 |
| **P4** | Lost nephew | Ph.D./IT | 2nd year | Karbala | 33 |
| **P5** | Lost brother & peers | Ph.D./Business Management | 4th year | Tikrit | 35 |
| **P6** | Lost relatives | Ph.D./ Accounting | 5th year | Baghdad | 36 |
| **P7** | Lost job | Ph.D./IT | 4th year | Najaf | 36 |
| **P8** | Lost two brother | Ph.D./Linguistics | 2nd year | Diwanyia | 63 |
| **P9** | Lost nephew | Ph.D./IT | 6th year | Karbala | 36 |
| **P10** | Lost cousin | Ph.D./Operation Research | 1st year | DhiQar | 32 |
| **P11** | Lost brother, uncle & cousin | Ph.D./Operation Research | 2nd year | Anbar | 37 |
| **P12** | Lost property | PhD/Linguistics | Six months | Hillah | 40 |
| **P13** | Lost son | Ph.D./Education | Four months | Baghdad | 52 |
| **P14** | Lost property& uncle | Ph.D./ Accounting | 3rd year | Mosul | 36 |
| **P15** | Lost property | Ph.D./IT | 3rd year | Basra | 36 |

Source: First Author's Research Data (2018).

**3.2      Procedure and Instrumentation**
The participants were informed about the main purpose of the research. The consent form was distributed over the collaborators based on the list of visiting lecturers and postgraduate names of Iraqi male persons. Through this method, a profile of the respondents was gained and the interview schedule was given for the face-to-face in-depth interviews. The interview took approximately fifteen to thirty minutes. The responses were audio-taped and transcribed. The venue of the interview that respondents chose was typically in the university environment and some of them prefer their homes where they felt comfortable to share their stories. The language used during the interview was Arabic language as requested by the respondents who are native speakers of Arabic.

**3.3      Data Analysis**
The interview response data were transcribed into English language. The transcriptions were then transcribed into Arabic language to check the accuracy of the data. Back to back translation was employed. The data were sorted out using Nvivo12 software and coded using the thematic content method by Braun and Clarke (2006).

## IV.      FINDINGS
The narratives posit five themes which include, embracing constructive dialogue, justice, scientific research, good leadership, and peaceful coexistence. The themes portray the inner personal peace emerging from the respondents' narratives of their tragic past experiences as explained below (Figure 1).
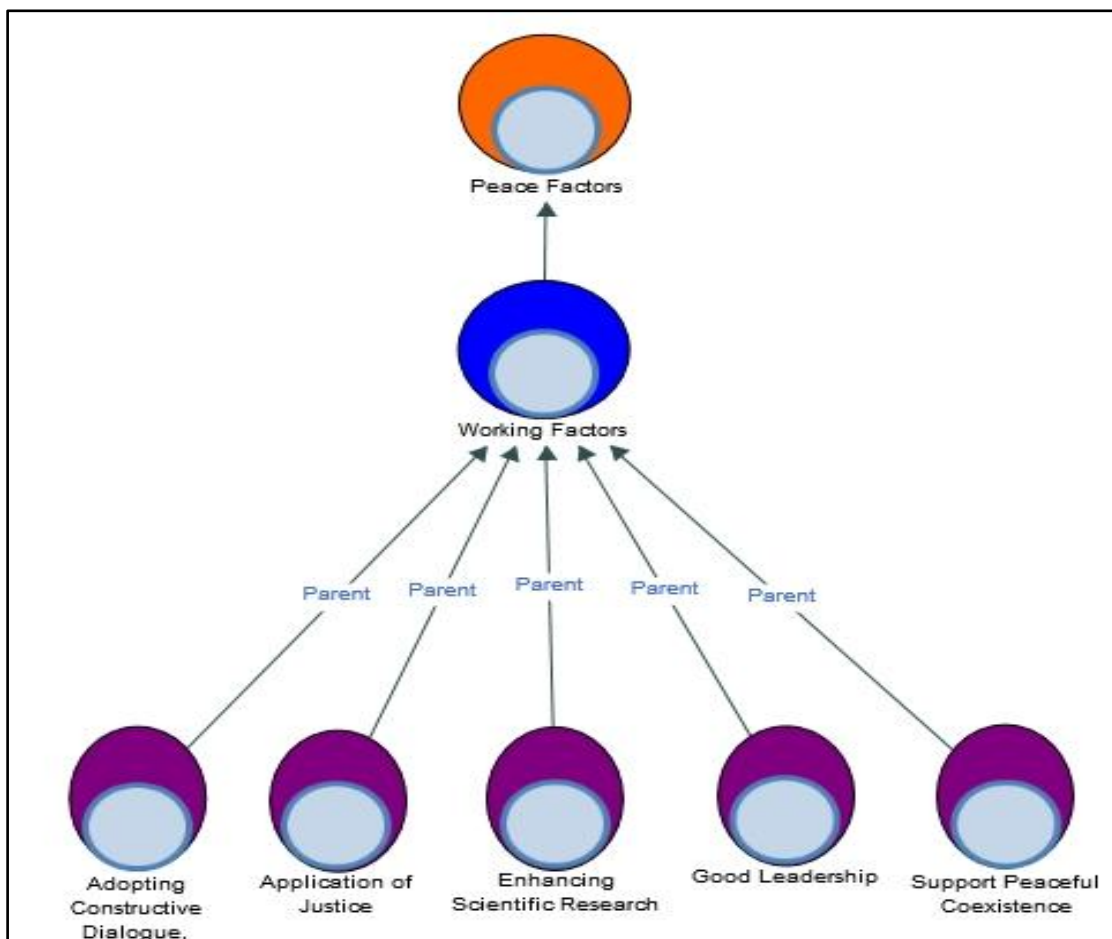
**Figure 1:** *Sub-themes of peace factors (First author's research data, 2018).*

**Theme 1**: ***To embrace a constructive dialogue***is the art of initiating positive and polite language when interacting with others. A person should try to keep the conversation as polite as possible without being exposed to negative things that influence the harmonious communication and the dignity of people.

The respondents narrated that during the current violence that takes placed around the world, all individuals should be polite and positive in conversing with the others by having a constructive dialogue.In that way, individuals can help to promote peace and amity, not conflicts as they have witnessed previously as shared by the respondents:-

**P15:**"*there are a lot of factors and efforts in Iraq that [can] promote peace and communication ... adopting the art of dialogue with others that reduce violence and conflicts as we witnessed.*"

**P6:**"*I think that the Iraqi government is able to improve the situation of the country and promote the concept of peace in the minds of people if it eliminates religious fanatics through promoting a constructive dialogue.*"

**P13:**"*... promoting the constructive talk among people ... will ultimately lead to reducing the disadvantages that harm the peaceful coexistence.*"

**P1:**"*first of all, adopt the constructive speech that reduces ignorance and support education and social culture among the people.*"

One participant (P11) remarked that violence can be curbed through embracing constructive dialogue that leads to peace:

**P11:**"*we faced a lot of violence acts ... as such, if the government embraces constructive dialogues among Shia and Sunni sects, of course, peace is the first success that the people will achieve.*"

**Theme 2: *To embrace justice***which is the core of achieving social dignity among people regardless of their ethnicity, color or even nationality

**P3:**"*I would like to say that if there is something that destroys the peaceful coexistence among Iraqis, it is the non-coexistence of the social justice among citizens ... hence, as I said, [peaceful coexistence] is another peace factor.*"

In a more comprehensive manner, one participant claimed;

**P7:**"*... as we said that practice of social justice among individuals' increases the sense of amity and creates harmonious communication as well as educated citizens to be away of violence.*"

**P10:** *"... in my perspective, the fastest step to spreading peace among Iraqis sects after all the tragic actions that Iraqis faced is to have the social justice."*

**P12:** *"..., therefore, [embracing] justice is the main reason to achieve peace ... if we have zero justice in [our] community, of course, the violence and revenge will arise among people."*

**Theme 3**: ***To embrace good education*** is a wise approach as it can help people build their communities and the key drive in eradicating ignorance and promoting harmony in the country.

**P11:** *"..., hence, I would like to say that the promoting [good] education in the society will create a sense of humanity [among people] towards others, because without education, the society becomes ignorant and backward."*

Similarity, two participantsstated the importance of having an educated society:

**P5:** *"I assert that if there was security and stability in a place in the world, there is no doubt that it is a motive and a sign of progress and supporting scientific research in that country."*

**P14:** *"...promoting [good] studies will [create positive] impact on the people and achieve peace in their minds and their community."*

Another participant, echoed by relating his past tragic experience as he remarked:

**P8:** *"... as well as education ... because without education the community becomes a jungle, the strong [people] 'eat' the rights of the weak [people]."*

**Theme 4**: ***To embrace good Leadership acts*** will lead to understanding the violence and complex ideological conflicts in the world through careful and polite acts of communication. One of the ways is by accepting others, regardless of religious beliefs.

**P1:** *"the wise leadership will lead the nation to believe in the concept of acceptance, [accepting] others regardless of their religion and sect."*

**P9:** *"... therefore, Iraqis can live in a harmonious environment in their cities with all sectors and regions if there is [a presence of] good leadership in the future."*

**P8:** *"a good leadership in any country certainly contributes to some extent in creating a peaceful and positive atmosphere among citizens, for instance, as the country that we are residing right now ... unfortunately, we [Iraqis] have not had this leadership till this moment."*

**P2:** *"a good leadership avoids people to think in the concept of nepotism."*

To concur, a few other participants stated the need to have peace and justice:

**P3:** *"Since we are generally concerned about the current situation in Iraq, consequently, the first demand of people is a good and wise leadership in order to avoid the tragedy, terrorism that impacted our social weft for many years."*

**P4:** *"... I believe that justice and peace is coming through good leadership."*

**P15:** *"... we can say that we will achieve peace if there is good leadership in our country."*

**Theme 5: *To embrace a peaceful coexistence*** isaneffective approachto building and promoting stronger relationships among citizens locally and internationally via the principle of accepting the diverse doctrines.

**P12:** *"... as such, I would like to mention the important issue in the Iraqi crises which is 'coexistence'. If Iraqis want to live in peace, they should support the peaceful coexistence in their community."*

**P5:** *"... so, without coexistence nobody could live in peace with the others."*

**P9:** *"one of the peace factors is promoting the peaceful coexistence among sects that they are struggling to achieve."*

**P7:** *"I would like to say that if we don't practice, or let me say supporting the peaceful coexistence in our daily live interactions and communications, definitely, we will not live in peace with other sects."*

## V. DISCUSSION

The outcomes reveal that the respondents tend to be positive and use peace language in their narration. The words and thoughts reflect the respondents' positive feelings in portraying peace and the positive factors that they believe in. Though they have experienced tragedies in their country that leave them with worse memories in their home country, they still remain calm and positive as observed from the positive conduct, politeness, and facial expressions during the interview sessions. Some of the respondents highlight the use of polite rhetoric or constructive dialogue in the communication among people in daily life. Meanwhile others have focused on the need to embrace good education as one of the important factors to promote peace and awareness in the society. Embracing justice and peaceful coexistence will assist in having harmonious interaction and decent life among Iraqis.

The respondents also emphasise one of the important factors that they believed can create and promote peace, development and stability, that is, good leadership. The male participants appear to be concerned with leadership as an important factor that increases peace and inner stability in community (Marshall, 2018). More

specifically, they argue that a good leadership plays a substantial role in developing peace, amity, and peaceful coexistence among people in any community. Such argument draws attention to the lack of wise leadership in the crises that Iraqis' have thus far encountered as shared by the male respondents. This seems to resonate much with them being male and wanting to make the world a better place to live for the women and children. Politeness tends to be associated with using language that encourages goodwill and intentions as exemplified by the respondents. For instance, peaceful coexistence is frequently uttered as one way to live harmoniously alongside each other. More specifically, promoting peace language and politeness communication leads the Iraqis to believe among themselves that such desire can be achieved among diverse sects especially when violence and conflicts seem to be endless.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The paper has shared the Iraqi students' and academicians' perspectives about the need for peace and polite language to achieve harmony among religiously diverse people. Being male, they all desire and believe that positive constructive dialogue will promote awareness in the importance of demonstrating good acts in society. Using peaceful language and practicing justice among all citizens will reduce grudges that tend to be rampant in communities where the sectarian and conflicts exist. The Iraqi participants believe that fanaticism and ignorance that take place among some Iraqi youths can be solved if they have in-depth understanding of people surrounding them. In this way, Iraqis will be able to exist alongside each other as is the case of multicultural Malaysia.

The impacted participants are eager to embrace peace language in their daily life communication which should be exemplars to the others. Good leadership encourages people to accept and coexist with others as well as prevent the complex conflicts in society. Exploring the use of good, positive language that denotes peace or enhances peaceful atmosphere should be the future research agenda in building and nurturing a society that embraces polite talk and hospitable language among its people. As such, people--ourselves included--will be more mindful of the language use in daily communication.

**Authors' Biodata**
**MinahHarun** (PhD in Communication, Ohio) is senior lecturer at the School of Languages, Civilization and Philosophy, College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia. She is a life member of Editors Association Malaysia and Malaysian Association of Applied Linguistics. Her current interests include interpersonal communication, interethnic communication, language and communication, discourse analysis, hospitality language, and learner difficulties.
**Ali Salah** previously taught English literature in English Language Department at the University of Samarra (Government University) in Salah Al-Din Governorates/Iraq. Prior to that, he taught Applied Linguistics at Alma'arf University College (Private University) in Al Anbar Governorates/Iraq. His current Ph.D. research involves examining the language of peace and the factors that enhance/hinder peace situation in human communication.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

[1]. Nelson, L. L. (2014). Peacefulness as a personality trait.In *personal peacefulness* (pp. 7–43). New York, NY: Springer.
[2]. Wahyuningsih, S. (2016, August 8-9). *The use of language of peace in social media as a way to promote a peaceful life.* International conference proceedings of peaceful life in Islam: Local and global challenges (pp. 307–314). Central Java - Indonesia.Retrieved fromhttps://osf.io/preprints/inarxiv/k87rp/
[3]. Sims, G. K., Nelson, L. L., & Puopolo, M. R. (Eds.). (2014). *Personal peacefulness*. New York: Springer.
[4]. Harun, M. (2007). *Malay-Chinese interethnic communication: An analysis of sensemaking in everyday experiences*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Ohio.
[5]. Weick, K. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing.* (2nd ed.). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
[6]. Nipkow, K. E. (2018). *God, human nature and education for peace: New approaches to moral and religious maturity*. New York: Routledge.
[7]. Friedrich, P. (2007). English for peace: Toward a framework of peace sociolinguistics. *World Englishes*, *26*(1), 72–83.
[8]. Gomes de Matos, F. (2000). Harmonizing and humanizing political discourse: The contribution of peace linguists. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, *6*(4), 339–344.
[9]. Blue, G. M., & Harun, M. (2003). Hospitality language as a professional skill. *English for Specific Purposes*, *22*(1), 73–91.
[10]. Dedaic, M. N., & Nelson, D. N. (Eds. ). (2012). *At war with words* (Rev. ed.). Walter de Gruyter, Berlin: Germany.
[11]. Ntlama, N. (2017). The foundations of 'peace' as a value for the promotion of human rights in Africa.

*African Human Rights Law Journal*, *17*(1), 55–67.

[12]. Al-Khalidi, A., & Tanner, V. (2006). *Sectarian violence: radical groups drive internal displacement in Iraq.*Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement.Massachusetts Ave, NW: Washington DC.

[13]. Cordesman, A. H. (2004). *The developing Iraqi insurgency: Status at end-2004. Cordesman Center for Strategic and International Studies*. Washington, DC.

[14]. Belloni, R. (2001). Civil society and peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Journal of Peace Research*, *38*(2), 163–180.

[15]. Goretti, L. N. (2007). Peace journalism applied: An assessment of media coverage of the conflict in Northern Uganda. *Conflict and Communication Online*, *6*(2), 1–9.

[16]. Morgan, B., & Vandrick, S. (2009). Imagining a peace curriculum: What second-language education brings to the table. *Peace & Change*, *34*(4), 510–532.

[17]. Obono, K., & Onyechi, N. J. (2017). Communication and peace building: The 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, *10*(7), 22–36.

[18]. Orjuela, C. (2003). Building peace in Sri Lanka: A role for civil society. *Journal of Peace Research*, *40*(2), 195–212.

[19]. Gleditsch, N. P., Nordkvelle, J., & Strand, H. (2014). Peace research-just the study of war? *Journal of Peace Research*, *51*(2), 145–158.

[20]. Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, *131*(6), 308–355.

[21]. Sheldon, K. M., & Kasser, T. (1995). Coherence and congruence: Two aspects of personality integration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *68*(3), 531–543.

[22]. Neff, K. D., Rude, S. S., & Kirkpatrick, K. L. (2007). An examination of self-compassion in relation to positive psychological functioning and personality traits. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *41*(4), 908–916.

[23]. Grewal, S., & Kapri, U. C. (2015). Education for world peace: need of the hour. *International Journal of Economic and Business Review*, *3*(1), 117–122.

[24]. Saxena, M. K., Kumar, S. R., & Aggarwal, S. (2011). Ways and means of achieving education for peace in schools. *Learning Community-An International Journal of Educational and Social Development*, *2*(1), 157–161.

[25]. Oxford, R. L. (Ed.). (2013). *The language of peace: Communicating to create harmony*. Charlotte, NC: USA.

[26]. Ugoji, S. C. (2017). The impact of language development and global peace initiative in the 21st century: The linguistic perspective. *Afrrev Ijah: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, *6*(1), 85–97.

[27]. Jadav, M. S. S., & Suvera, P. S. (2014). Well-Being among Hindu and Muslim educated unemployed people. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *01*(02), 19–26.

[28]. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

[29]. Marshall, G. S. (2018). Leaders and leadership. In *military leadership* (6th Edition., pp.25-37). New York: Routledge.