Prejudice and Stereotypes in School Environment
- Application to adolescence -

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Abstract

In this paper we will investigate the area of the behaviors influenced by prejudice and stereotypes and also the discrimination in schools. We want to show the measure in which the teachers apply different treatments on students depending on gender and perception (if the student is seen as being good or bad). Thus, we were interested to see the measure in which the students are influenced by these prejudice (the measure in which they are conscious of them, if they are emotional influenced by them or not and the measure in which, on their turn, are contaminated by prejudices concerning teachers and concerning the other equal members in the group).

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emotional part of individual and collective attitudes, while prejudice represent the cognitive part, and discrimination the action part of these attitudes in the relation between person and social groups.

2. Premises

According to Whitley and Kite [4], there are numerous types of prejudices: racial prejudices, ethnic prejudices, prejudices concerning sex/sexuality, prejudices concerning the age, prejudices concerning the social status, occupation, prejudices concerning the membership to a certain group.

But how prejudices appear? The answer makes references to a serious of generating roots: social, emotional and cognitive. Among the generating social roots can be find competition, in equal power, references groups. [4]

The school environment hasn’t been exempted by the influence of the prejudices, stereotypes and discriminations. Inevitably the teacher has a pre-set optics, a series of stereotypes depending on which he/she actions and which guides the activities of training and assessment. The good students are seen all the time as being good and bad ones even they have a real progress, objectively in teachers eye the label in the past will be more powerful and it will pass a period of time until the elimination of that label. The educational favouritism is a negative phenomenon which must be studied in connection with whom must be elaborated efficient methods of counteraction. Thus, the gender of the teacher will influence, in a subtle way, the way in which the student is perceived, the quality of the given attention and his assessment.

As it showed P. Golu [1], the expectances of the teachers – bigger, concerning some students or smaller, concerning other – affects in general the performances of the students. Depending on the impression good or bad that the teacher formulates about some of his students as having unusually capability or about others as being very bad, the teacher will apply a specific treatment, asking the performances which could confirm his expectances.

Another pressure in school environment will be the one from the pears in the group, namely the regression to the mean. It’s about the fact that the group drives each of its members to mediocrity, to unification. Thus, the students which are good will be automatically catalogued as being “grind” or “the favourite of the teacher”. Many times in this conflict, in this case of cognitive affective discord the students must choose between mediocrity (which is the norm of the equals in the group) and the last of the status of a grid member of the group (instant consequences of some superior school performances).

3. Objectives

Thus, we purpose: to investigate the behaviours affected by prejudices and the discriminations in school (high-school level); to underline the measure in which the teacher apply different treatments to students depending on gender and perception (if the student is seen as being good or bad); to see in what measure the students are influenced by these prejudices (in what measure are conscious of them, if are emotionally affected by them or not and in what measure they, on their turn, are contaminated by prejudices concerning teachers and concerning the other equal members in the group).

4. Hypothesis

In order to make these research I’ve proposed three relevant hypothesis in conformity with the objectives mentioned before: at the same level of performance, the boys have bigger grades than the girls; the teachers will be more kind with the boys than with the girls (they show more positive behaviours); the boys appreciate that they are superiors the girls in that concerns intelligence and the girls consider themselves as being superiors to boys.
5. Variables

I’ve used as independent variable the gender of the subjects and as dependent variable the school performance (history and biology) and the attitudes of the teachers.

6. Subjects

In this research we used four high school classes (two classes from 10th grade and two from 12th grade) belonging from a high school in Bucharest. The number of subjects is of 123, 60 boys and 63 girls, all coming from urban environment.

7. Methods and instruments

**Observation method** - the observation protocol tries to reveal the measure in which the teacher’s estimations are very different from the results of knowledge test, comparing the degrees obtained by the students in the same lesson; it will be quantified the positive, indifferent and negative behaviours of the students. Example of indicators: the gender of the student and of the teacher, the category good or bad from which the student takes part in conformity with the table elaborated by the teacher, the general position of student while he is listen to the lesson, the attitude of the teacher (he smiles, he approves, he interferes, he shows indifferences), the tone of the teacher (approvable, indifferent, aggressive), the degree the student received.

**Attitude questionnaire** has 40 items and it has two scales, one for boys and one for girls. This questionnaire aims to measure the subjects attitude towards opposite gender. The scale for boys has a Cronbach alpha = 0.79 (liminf95% = 0.66; limsup95% = 0.88), and the scale for girls has a Cronbach alpha = 0.81 (liminf95% = 0.69; limsup95% = 0.89). At some items the subjects had to answer with yes or no, and at other items subjects had to feel the sentence with adjectives which describe the opposite gender. For example: “I like to play basketball”. “While the boys are more cerebral, the girls are more communicative”, “I like to play volleyball”, “While the girls are gentler, the boys are more aggressive”. It is quantified the numbers of positive and negative attitudes and it is made a mean. The assessment is made with one of the following values: 1 = bad opinion about the representative of the opposite gender; 2 = indifferences over the representative of the opposite gender; 3 = good opinion about representative of the opposite gender. A bigger score means a more favourable attitude.

8. Results’ interpretation

For conforming the **first hypothesis**, we’ve proceed in the following way: initially we have chosen some study subjects depending on which to be done the assessment: it has been chosen an exact discipline (biology) and a humanistic one (history). To each of them has been announced a test of whose degree wouldn’t be written in the registry book. I have chosen accessible subjects form the manual (after I found from the teacher what lesson the students were learning). Thus, the emotional charge was note significant at the most we can speak about the wish at the students to make impression. The paper has been assessed taking into a count criteria as the precision of the presented information, the quantity of the information and generalisation level of the language (including the quality of the language, phraseology).

I’ve compared the mean of grades of the students test (comparison between the means of the girls and the mean of the boys). To each of these three scales has been given a grade from one to ten at the end being made the mean and thus resulting the final grade. The students have been perfectly conscious that these grades won’t be seen in their registry book. The grades to this papers have been a secret also for students (which have been announced that they will find them at the right moment) and also for the teachers.
Then, we’ve proceeded to observation method applied to two lessons of biology and two lessons of history at each class. The observation has revealed the measure in which subjective-objective estimation of the teachers are significantly different from the results obtained at tests, in the same way, comparing the grades obtained by the boy evaluated at a similar lesson with that from the test, the girls being evaluated at the same lesson. In the same way, we’ve compared the means of two groups (boys and girls).

Also, we’ve counted the positive, negative and indifferent behaviours showed to the students and we compare the mean of those. We count the degree means obtained by the students at these study objects and we compare these means between girls and boys using independent sample t test. Then we’ve compared the boys’ degree with the girls’ degree at the teacher assessment.

Thus, the difference at the biology evaluation is significant (t = 3.912, p<0.05) and the difference at the history evaluation in not significant (t = -0.693; p>0.05).

At biology the boys mean is 9.64 (SD = 2.34) and the girls mean is 8.20 (SD = 2.24). At history the boys mean is 9.36 (SD = 2.32) and the girls mean is 9.15 (SD = 2.31) and there isn’t a significant difference between the means (p<0.05) in what concerns the assessment of the teachers.

It results that the first hypothesis is confirmed just partially, namely in the case of the biology.

The second hypothesis has being tested using observation method, quantifying the number of positive and negative behaviours shown by the teacher to the students. Then I’ve compared the mean between behaviours towards the boys and ones towards the girls, on behavioural classes.

Regarding to the mean of positive behaviours of the teacher to students the situation is as following: at biology, the mean of positive behaviours shown to the boys is 11.94 (SD = 2.78) and the mean of positive behaviours shown to the girls is 5.86 (SD = 1.04). These difference is significant (t = 6.807; p<0.05). In conclusion, the teacher behaviour is more positive to the boys than the girls (he shown more positive attitude to the boys than the girls).

At history, the mean of positive behaviours shown to the boys is 7.82 (SD = 1.21) and the mean of positive behaviours shown to the girls is 5.18 (SD = 0.82). These difference is significant (t = 3.495; p<0.05). The teacher behaviour is more positive to the boys than the girls (he shown more positive attitude to the boys than the girls).

Regarding negative behaviours, at biology the mean of negative behaviours shown to the boys is 0.70 (SD = 0.14) and the mean of negative behaviours shown to the girls is 1.34 (SD = 0.53). These difference isn’t significant (t = -1.772; p>0.05). In conclusion, the teacher behaviour isn’t more positive to the boys than the girls.

At history, the mean of negative behaviours shown to the boys is 1.52 (SD = 0.55) and the mean of negative behaviours shown to the girls is 1.18 (SD = 0.53). These difference isn’t significant (t = 0.702; p>0.05). In conclusion, the teacher behaviour isn’t more positive to the boys than the girls. The indifferent behaviours weren’t taking into a count.

The conclusion is that the hypothesis is confirmed just partially, in the sense that the teachers show more positive behaviours towards the boys than towards the girls, and this doesn’t mean that they are by no means less kind (aggressive) with girls.

For the third hypothesis, we have given collectively the questionnaire concerning the own conception, having 20 items, and which measured the image of the member of a group towards the others. The hypothesis has been tested by using t test, comparing the means of the results obtained at the attitude questionnaire. Then, I’ve compared the means of the negative attitudes of the boys towards the girls, respectively of the girls to the boys: mean negative attitude boys (towards girls) = 11.95 (SD = 2.78), mean negative attitude girls (towards boys) = 11.61 (SD = 2.76), (t = 0.570, p>0.05). Thus, there isn’t a significant difference between the negative attitudes of the two groups.

9. Conclusions
Recognising the personal identity of the young is a complex and hard process. This is why, in this context, the approached topic, that of stereotypes and prejudices, becomes significant. The adult and the models offered by him - may he be parent, educator, and friend - represent the source of the apparition of these phenomena of social distortion. In this moment, it is hard to suppose that the adolescent finished cognitively the whole surrounding reality, the whole social life, in order to make by himself representations and beliefs about these. This is why it is more sure, from a social point of view, to take something from outside, to assimilate, without believing in it. But the perpetuation of these “trap” mechanisms will determine the apparition of the belief that are his/hers own and, with time, the adolescent will think in this way.

Concerning the research, after applying the instruments and the interpretation of the results, can be underlined the following conclusions:

The first hypothesis – at the same level of performance, the boys will have bigger grades than the girls – it is confirmed just partially, only in the case of biology.

The second hypothesis – the teachers are more kind with the boys than with the girls (show more positive behaviours) – it is confirmed just partially, in the sense that the teachers show more positive behaviours towards the boys than towards the girls, without meaning that are less kind (aggressive) with the girls.

The expressivity is richer, more gradated and more positive when at the blackboard there is a boy than when is a girl. The girls receive less positive feed-back from the teachers. In this case, it is a self fulfilling prophecy. The teacher predicts that the girls won’t manage very well and thus he doesn’t adopt a favourable attitude, giving more stress to the girl. Thus, if she is a little bit fearsome, the attitude of the teacher will emphases this estate and feeling, completely discouraging her.

Concerning the third hypothesis – the boys appreciate themselves as being superior to girls in what concerns the intelligence, and the girls consider that they are superior to the boys – it results that there isn’t a significant difference between the negative attitudes of the two groups.

We assist to a real “war of genres”, which starts in early adolescence and surely continues in adult life.

The general conclusion is that, in school environment, there are prejudices concerning genre, discriminations between girls and boys, although from the side of the teachers towards boys/girls, but also between boys/girls.

10. Further directions

The natural tendency is to make categorisation, which conduct to stereotypes regarding people personalities and abilities, which influences significantly the way in which we are processing the social information. Although stereotype and prejudice may be positive or negative, we consider that for a good development of interpersonal relationship, it is needed a de-stereotyping process.

Thus, appears the necessity of some interventions on attitudinal and behavioural optimisation direction. At educational level, the programs and the teacher attitudes must be based on ethnic, social, sexual, religious equality. Also, intensified contacts between different groups can generate the belief that they aren’t so different from this point of view. Intervention modalities must be imposed, in order to intensify the contacts between boys and girls, as each other to observe the less of utility of these prejudices and to make them to disappear.

References