SOCIAL STEREOTYPES IN ARMENIAN SCHOOLS IN LEBANON

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Abstract

The article analyzes and reveals the difficulties caused by social stereotypes encountered in Armenian schools in Lebanon. The problem of social stereotypes in the educational process has been and remains the focus of attention of pedagogues and psychologists. After all, the level of their educational process also depends on the level of awareness of social stereotypes. The effectiveness of awareness about social stereotypes in the educational process depends not only on the correct selection, development and application of educational programs, methods, means, forms, but also on the implementation of the whole systematic educational process, the pedagogues. The current research investigated the social stereotypes through 134 teachers from different regions, subject areas and teaching experiences. The google form used shed light on teacher awareness of these stereotypes and the types of social stereotypes that exists in these schools. The research offers recommendations and perspectives for universities and schools that aim to combat inequality and stereotypes in communities by equipping educators with knowledge about social stereotypes and new teaching strategies.

Keywords: Social stereotypes, social skills, equality, inequality, educational psychology.

1. Introduction

The world before and after the Covid 19 pandemic won't be the same. People around the world fought the challenge in different ways, some with perseverance and survival mode, while others in hopelessness and demotivation. The past decades enormous research has been done in social psychology to understand, comprehend and document human behavior, social theories, learning and change as well as evolving and development in human nature. The field of psychology attempts to understand humans to help predict and improve lifestyles of populations and lives and create more sustainable communities. The past and current challenges allow us to examine further our teaching perspectives and strategies.

Education and psychology attempt to investigate and understand groups and their dynamics, most rigorously since the 1990s, when globalization and digitalization somehow broke the boundaries of groups to reach larger societies and communities. Group norms, accepted behaviors, and means of communication began to evolve. Mode of knowledge, transferring attitudes, efficiency or members and intergroup conflicts all took on a new notion and importance.

These same common grounds and activities that join people together, may also be a factor to discriminate some groups over others, through giving rise to stereotypes. Stereotypes are one of the social problems that may come to surface when investigating lives inside communities and relations among members.

Schools need to be miniatures of our communities and when we want individuals to feel safe, to be able to grow and reach full potential, then schools also need to offer equal opportunities to different groups and also allow all members to have choice and voice in their learning processes. The research sheds light on the social stereotypes found in schools and aims to understand them in order to be able to address them and attempt to create most tolerance, acceptance and eventually a culture that celebrates diversity and grows together towards common goals and shared values.

Stereotypes in all their forms aim to benefit a group against the other and categorize individual into forms that even they may not be aware. The first step would be to identify the presence of these stereotypes and then to understand the causes and attempt to investigate opportunities and bets practices to cater to an educational system where all stakeholders are having their voice heard in a safe haven.

2. Research problem

When we talk about stereotypes, it is the common belief that categorizes people, in exaggerated matters that may also not be true. This categorization that identifies people based on physical, social or cultural characteristics assumes that all people in a given category or subgroup will manifest all these given traits.

Stereotypes as a simple term, 'pictures in our heads' refer to an internal, mental representation of social groups in contrast to their external reality. Stereotypes play their role from the earliest moments in the information processing sequence, giving preference to stereotype-consistent options. To date, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that stereotypes influence the manner in which information is sought, perceived, remembered, and judged (Fiske, 1998).

Stereotyping disregards the objective definitions and holistic approaches, making the entities only about one aspect or attribute. This makes representation of things as fixed and unchanging. Stereotypes act as a distancing mechanism, radically separating those stereotyped from those among whom the stereotypes circulate and are reproduced. Stereotyping always focuses on differences and offers an extra edge to a group of people as if giving less rights to another (Pickering, 2015).

In the past decade, lab-based experimental research has increased in terms of investigating the process of cumulative cultural evolution. It is crucial to examine how societal stereotypes might form and evolve through a process of cumulative cultural evolution as social information is repeatedly passed from person to person. Social psychology research has done much to inform our understanding about the substantial influence stereotypes exert on us as individuals and on our society, yet comparatively little is known about how society's pools of stereotype knowledge form and how they evolve (Baum, Richerson, Efferson, & Paciotti, 2004; Caldwell & Millen, 2008; Kirby, Cornish, & Smith, 2008; Whiten, Caldwell, & Mesoudi, 2016).

Questions concerning the controllability of automatic stereotypes are debated (Fiske, 1998). It appears that a desire to believe that stereotypes can be controlled, perhaps because of their pernicious social consequences, can result in the wishful assessment that they are indeed controllable. Automatic stereotypes do not appear to be controllable by ordinary acts of conscious will. However, habitual patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior toward social groups that cohere with broader value systems and ideology appear to predict automatic responses.

Schools represent a model of community; it is a miniature version of a group of people living together with different ages and backgrounds, being ruled by a set of rules, policies and procedures. They also have common clear expectations as well as actions and consequences. Schools guided by mission vision offer services, share responsibilities and involve stakeholders. Then these same stereotypes can be examined on the school grounds and inside classrooms.

2.1. The research significance

Societies have identified the need for improvement and advancement as we educate the youth for the sustainability and improvement of communities, thus setting up schools as formal institutions that understand the needs of the society and prepare youth can help improve and develop lifestyles and cultures (Tweed and Lehman, 2002).

Schools as organizations, also evolved from the classic teacher centered traditional ones, to more contemporary modern digital phase. Taylor's theory explains that stereotypes are cognitive structures that represent general beliefs and expectations about a particular group of people. These beliefs are often based on limited information and used as mental "shortcuts" to help individuals process information quickly and make sense of the world around them. (Fiske, Taylor, 2020)

This current study examined the teachers inside the pedagogical institutions in the Armenian community in Lebanon in terms of levels and types of exhibited stereotypes in terms of age, gender and profession. The research aimed to offer insight into definition, implication, history and effects of stereotypes. It studies the relationship of emotional intelligence of teachers in these schools and the social stereotypes that they exhibited.

Teaching students about stereotypes raises awareness and affirms the self, educating about differences, reframing goals of learning and offering equal opportunities. The significance of this research is to understand the social stereotypes in these classrooms and then propose and recommend guidelines to help teachers combat these inequalities and help create equity in the societies through education.

2.2. Research objectives

In explaining the nature of stereotypes to derive predictions and to identify the role of the individual perceiving and the impact of the society, three theories were examined and compared. Stereotypes influence perceptions, understanding and expectation of the given situations showing favoritism to in groups and bias to those in out groups. Thus, integrating different theories to understand the phenomenon can be a better tool to evaluate it. Incorporating mechanisms by several theories simultaneously, can limit other effects and yield a more objective perspective. Introducing different indicators and intergroup interactions can enhance the accuracy of theories of stereotypes (Jussim, Coleman and Lerch, 1987).

The large circle of the society and the community under study were the teachers of the schools in Lebanon. The pedagogical staff, teachers, in these schools were examined, through the eyes of social psychology, specifically in the knowledge and awareness of stereotypes as well as its effects in these institutions, in relation to other variables.

Overall, the aim of the research is to
1. Determine what social stereotypes are present among teachers
2. Examine how these stereotypes relate to gender, profession, age groups and other social factors.
3. Explore how teachers and school staff contribute to or challenge existing stereotypes.
4. Analyze the effectiveness of teacher training programs in addressing and reducing stereotypes.
5. Propose recommendations aimed at reducing stereotype-based discrimination.

3. Methodology and findings

The tool used was "TOLERANCE INDEX" EXPRESS-QUESTIONNAIRE. The Tolerance index is a concept introduced by G.U. Soldatova, O.A. Kravtsova, O.E. Khukhlaev and L.A. Shaygerova in their Expressive questionnaire, which is a survey instrument designed to assess an individual's attitudes towards tolerance (aspects, types). The questions are designed to assess tolerance in various domains. Express questionnaire "Tolerance Index" (authors: G.U. Soldatova, O.A. Kravtsova, O.E. Khukhlaev, L.A. Shaigerova).

Participants rated how much they agree with the following statements by placing a check mark next to each question in the appropriate column. The results showed that the participants with less than 10 years of experience in teaching had a low level of tolerance, similar to those who had 10-20 or 20+ years of experience. There was a difference in terms of gender in tolerance: females showed a medium level of tolerance compared to men.

The same dimensions of tolerance were measured in terms of age of the participants, results were as follows. Teachers aged 25-40 showed medium level of tolerance compared to young less than 25, and older 40+ aged teachers. The overall tolerance level for the various age groups and genders ranged from low to average. The participants did not show high tolerance.

For the goal of assessing social stereotypes the researcher created and administered tools to investigate the social stereotypes in the given population. Questionnaire for assessment of expression of age stereotypes.

The presence of social stereotypes related to professions was overall low. In depth investigation showed that Participants who had less than 10 years of teaching experience and those with 10-20 years showed low professional and age-related stereotypes. Teachers who were longer in teaching (10 years +) had a medium level of stereotypes demonstrated. The same tool was also investigating in terms of teacher's age, the results were showing evidence of increase in age and increase in stereotypes manifestations. The older the participants got from ages 40-60 and to 60+, the social stereotypes were more evident.

Next tool was the questionnaire for determining the expression of social stereotypes related to age shed light on the type of present stereotypes.

The results for stereotypes related to age were more evident. There was a low level of stereotypes present for "older" groups of teachers, having a medium level of stereotypes related to new and to experienced teachers.

4. Data analysis

The results of the tolerance test offered a low level of tolerance of the others, in teachers ages 40+ compared to young teachers (ages 25-39). In terms of social stereotypes related to age, teachers age 40-60 exhibited the highest level of manifested stereotypes. Teachers with 25+ years of experience had a low level of acceptance of the other, and tolerating the different "out groups" especially if age was a factor.

Finally, it was evident with the use of 'Age related stereotypes" that teachers who were considered "Old" were showing a high level of stereotypes. It was also clear that overall educators believed that there were age related stereotypes targeted to teachers ages 60+ the most. The data using various tools used in terms of emotional intelligence, tolerance and empathy in correlation with stereotypes related to professions, age and gender offered insight about the 104 teachers in Armenian schools in Lebanon and an urgent need to address these stereotypes manifestations, through increasing the teacher tolerance level, thus improving teacher empathy and help raise the tolerance level and acceptance of the other.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The environment that encourages acceptance, minimizes conflicts and stereotypes between groups, invests in the individual and the team profile, gains improvement in the quality of relationships. As noted by Daniel Goleman, 1998, Working with Emotional Intelligence, targeting and catering to individual and team growth, allows organizations to excel in performance. Training such as empathy, cooperation, awareness of strengths and weaknesses, self-confidence and problem solving, flexibility, allows individuals to become better versions of the self, and as a team build good relationships, improve flow of work and trust relationship, minimizes stereotypes, better decisions making and productivity increases.

Emotional intelligence, a skill highly needed in the teaching profession places males and females on similar platforms in terms of capabilities; when female teachers show more empathy and are more aware of their emotions, male teachers manage stress better and show resilience. Emotional quotient (EQ) accounts for 80% of life and career success. (Goleman, 1998).

Social skills and emotional wellbeing are remedies that could be offered to teacher preparatory courses to better equip them with tools to be more aware of structuring lessons that help create equity inside classrooms. Research shows that some changes could be made through policy makers to create more equality in schools and communities through education.

Some teaching related perspectives would be to train learns and educators on emotional intelligence) Goleman, 1995), introduce social emotional learning programs (CASEL) integrate diversity and inclusion training (Zeichner, 2012), promote culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) foster critical reflection and dialogue (Zeichner, K. M., & Conklin, H. G., 2008), implement case studies and role playing. (Cooks & Wang, 2018), develop skills for effective communication (Howard, 2006), encourage collaboration with diverse communities (Gay, 2010) and ongoingly evaluate and adjust curricula to meet the needs of the community and the society (Banks & Banks, 2019).

It has been evident that the ability to manage challenging emotions in healthy ways and create calmness and resilience, offers emotion regulation tools and results in healthy relationships. Emotional intelligence allows teachers, and then learners, to become physically and emotionally healthy citizens, developing effective ways to manage relationships, minimize peer pressure and stress from society, focusing more on self-development and growth, competition with the self and creating a better version of the individual.

By integrating these recommendations into teacher preparatory courses, educators can be better equipped to address and reduce social stereotypes in their classrooms, fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

This minimizes the group formations and polarization inside societies and educational institutions, thus increasing performance of individuals who are focused and resolve conflicts, being committed to the work and are efficient (Sheykhjan, Moradi, Kamran, Rajeswari, 2014).

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