

## **Stereotypes about Romanians in education, professional orientation and in today's society**

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### **Abstract**

*Stereotypes and prejudices influence our daily lives, and in certain circumstances we operate with them, despite the fact that we think we are free of prejudices. Not infrequently, they can become barriers in the communication, knowledge and acceptance of those around us; from this point of view, we must have the readiness to deal with our own prejudices, so that we do not reach situations of discrimination, marginalization, rejection or exclusion of some people on subjective grounds, influenced by stereotypes and misrepresentations about others (we often observe that our attitude and behavior towards a stranger is influenced by the way that person looks or is dressed). This study is based on stereotypes. It aims to identify attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate or challenge gender stereotypes in education. We will see what is stereotype, prejudice, discrimination, we will go a little bit on gender, cultural and language stereotypes, and finally we will see concrete examples within a school unit. This theme has become a problem of society. Stereotypes give rise to prejudices, and further discrimination. And during this research I noticed that since we were born, these things have been instilled in us.*

**Key words:** *education, stereotypes, prejudices, Romanians, interculturalism, society, education system, gender, culture, language, teachers, students.*

### **Introduction**

Stereotypes can be a much discussed topic. I want to highlight a little this topic starting from something general and pointing to a narrower framework. Through this research and analysis, I also want to show my point of view, the point of view of a person of Romanian nationality, also referring to my internships abroad, six months with a French educational system on the French Riviera, Nice and another six months with a Spanish educational system in Galicia, Vigo. Therefore, I could even make a comparison between the Romanian, French and Spanish systems, but highlighting what interests us: stereotypes. In addition, due to the attendance at the high school classes for pedagogical practice I was able to identify some stereotypes encountered during those classes.

Some of the most known stereotypes about Romania and Romanians are:

- Romanians are very poor;
- Romanians are thieves;
- Romanians are Gypsies;
- Romania is Dracula`s land;

- Everything is cheap;
- Budapest is the capital of Romania;
- Romania is an insecure country;
- Romanians are Russians.

A person's perception is based on what he / she has heard about the country and in general, all we get are misconceptions, a distorted image of the reality of the country and the inhabitants. Dracula's land, the land of thieves and Gypsies are just some of the ideas that come to mind when thinking about Romania.

Bucharest is often confused with Budapest and many people think that Budapest is the capital of Romania and honestly Romanians are not happy with this image. Dracula is just a fictional character created by the Irish writer Bram Stoker, he has no roots in Romanian folklore or in Romanian literature. It is associated with the historical personality of Vlad Țepeș, old ruler of Wallachia. And no, there are no vampires in Romania.

While many travelers expect very low prices when it comes to traveling in Romania, it actually depends on what you want to buy and at the same time when you think about the price, you also think about the economic level of the country. The food is cheaper than in the countries of central and eastern Europe and you can enjoy very good food, but if we look at clothes or gas, the prices are the same as in central and western Europe.

Many people still believe that on the streets of Romania there is a risk of being robbed or deceived, especially by taxi drivers. Some time ago this might be true, but Romania today is no more dangerous than any other European country. Romanians are very sociable and willing to help in any situation.

Everywhere we hear that Romanians are Gypsies, but what people do not know is that Gypsies or Roma (not Romanians) are an original ethnic group from India that have spread throughout Europe. In Romania, there is an ethnic minority that represents three percent of the population. Besides, not all Roma are beggars. Some have studied and worked, and traditional Gypsies have their own dress code and traditions established by the community

Geographically, Romania is close to Russia and is surrounded by Slavic countries so, the world believes that the Romanian language is similar to Russian and at the same time some physical features make others believe that we are in fact Russians. Not all foreigners know that Romanian is a Latin language similar to French, Spanish and Italian and that less than ten percent of the words come from old Slavonic language. However, the Bulgarian, German and Turkish words in the Romanian vocabulary make the language difficult to understand for other Romance language speakers.

Romania is classified as a poor country and people who have not visited it consider it a poorly developed country, in fact, it is about perspective. The minimum economy gap is much lower than in countries such as France, Germany, but the cost of living is also lower.

Some nations believe that Romanians as well as immigrants go to other countries to steal and even accuse Romanians of stealing the jobs of the natives of that country. This was especially the case of the United Kingdom, where reports were published in certain newspapers in 2014 on the growth of Romanian and Bulgarian workers. However, according to The Telegraph, former Prime Minister David Cameron said Romanians work hard, pay taxes and are appreciated by their employers.

There are many things related to this topic, these are just a few examples, but we will see further, more detailed and concrete examples. It is a very interesting topic and can be analyzed from many perspectives and this article can be further developed.

**What is a stereotype? But a prejudice? Can this be called discrimination?**

Stereotypes and prejudices influence our daily lives and in certain circumstances we relate to them, despite the fact that we consider ourselves as people without prejudices. Not infrequently they even turn into barriers at the level of discourse/communication, in the thinking of a person and in the acceptance of those around us, from this point of view we should fight with our own prejudices, in order not to reach marginalization situations, discrimination, rejection or exclusion of some acquaintances for subjective reasons, influenced by stereotypes and misrepresentations about others (for example, we notice that our attitude and behavior towards a person are influenced by how that person looks or is dressed).

Stereotypes respect fixed, deformed ideas, superficial thoughts, camouflaged myths or common, generally bad comments that the person has, in relation to the people, situations, things, phenomena, for which our brain tries to simplify the complex reality, through which the mind and the body can automatically respond to similar stimuli, are part of the cultural heritage and are presented over time as social norms, customs, traditions (there are studies that demonstrate the presence of stereotypes around school children as well). Therefore, we are "infected" from childhood with certain ideas, messages, information that give rise to stereotypes and so prejudices appear (for example: black cat and number 13 bring bad luck; men cannot cry; salt spilled brings family into dispute; if you return from the road, you will have bad luck that day; etc.).

Once internalized, in our own thinking system, it transforms us into some little robots who put into practice any kind of clichés and "software" received from family, friends, through communication and other intermediates, previously being enriched with our own contribution. And so, it is believed that boys are superior to girls, the ideal of feminine beauty is translated by measures 90-60-90 and that it is enough to have money to be someone.

Prejudices refer rather to a preconceived opinion, wrong reasoning, emotional reaction, position, attitude, pro or cons, favorable or unfavorable, compared to one or more persons, based on belonging to a group or to an ethnic group, culture, religion, social class or influenced by other personal characteristics. Therefore, prejudices and stereotypes can be understood as protective filters developed by humans against the influx of information on the basis of which we judge events, situations, people without direct, personal knowledge. They limit us to the correct and objective understanding of a reality and build barriers, frequently, very rigid in communication or interaction with those around us.

Most of the time when prejudices and stereotypes lead to the development and use of other labels for a person without thinking about its effect or impact on the people involved. It is no less true that these labels, as soon as they are issued, create the illusion of a state of tranquility, freedom and satisfaction, without having to anticipate the long-term effects and costs (it is said that the most painful injuries are those caused by words. and not the physical ones).

Why do we rush to classify the actions and behaviors of those around us, being viewed as good or bad, and we never accept that human decisions are relative and that they are related to many other factors? Is the first impression of a person/thing frequently affected by our prejudices? What does it feel like when people around us analyze you based on stereotypes and prejudices? What might cause the person to deal with their own stereotypes and prejudices? There are many questions, but almost no one thinks of giving an answer by acting in a positive way.

Building your own personality must be a process by which your own voice is asserted, in order to avoid labels that reduce prospects. From my point of view, I think it is less important to show others

that we are free from prejudice, more important to show that we are fighting our own prejudices and to succeed in this battle. You cannot understand and respect the one next to you until you accept the fight with your own prejudices. The man who has too many prejudices cannot enjoy his freedom and will find the road to truth much more difficult.

Discrimination differs from stereotypes and prejudices because it is the actual behavior. It is defined as differentiated and observable behavior towards a social group or its members. For example, if we know a black girl and of another nationality, we classify her in the groups of women, of another nationality and of black race, due to these classifications the gender, cultural and language stereotypes appear. In this case, the people who surround this girl in addition to stereotypes, also develop prejudices, and this can lead to discrimination, there will be a different negative or positive behavior regarding her person.

In order to identify stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination, we must study someone who belongs to a certain social group and who by being a member of it is discriminated against by another person belonging to another group. Due to the circumstances, stereotypes and prejudices may develop, but not discrimination or only stereotypes without prejudice or discrimination may develop. In general, stereotypes give way to prejudices that can lead to discrimination.

### **Gender, cultural and language stereotypes**

#### ✓ Gender stereotypes in Romania

I read a lot about activities, experiences and concerns in support of gender equality, opportunities in Romanian society and there is a lot of talk about equality between women and men, discrimination at work, gender discrimination, feminism and other things. Gender stereotypes exist in us, probably before we are born, even when some parents express their desire to have a boy or a girl. So, it favors the little one in a way if it meets the preferences and expectations. Although some parents are quickly accommodating with a child of another sex, others are more or less difficult to accommodate. Since the first days of life, gender-based discrimination appears, although unintentional. So, many times, the girl is nicer, she should not behave like a boy, she must play with dolls and she must not have knees bent, while the boy must be a manufacturer, to develop his passions through Lego and engines, be more aggressive and not cry in public as a little girl.

In school if a girl does a fool, she was taught by someone and the same situation in the case of boys who know what to disturb the teacher in the classroom. In the university, one wonders: What are girls doing in Polytechnics or Agronomy? And why do boys come to the faculties of human sciences? These questions can be found even at the high school level. Also referring to these stereotypes, we notice that there are jokes with blondes (going on the idea that blondes are stupid), it is approved when someone talks about women as bad drivers, it is said that women do not know much about descriptive geometry (or mechanics, engines) and that men cannot express their emotions and other things.

#### ✓ Cultural stereotypes: What do foreigners think about Romania?

Romanians are a nation obsessed with their own image and this is especially noticeable as international news is presented in the press. We turn on the TV and see the same news on three different channels from international to national and local ones. On the first channel, the title is "Possible treatments for cancer", on the national one "A Romanian has discovered a treatment for cancer", and on the local channel "A person from the city X cured of cancer". The despair is clearly observed after validation. From the same sense of pride comes our indignation against what foreigners say about the Romanian nation. There was outrage when English TV programs made news about poor Romanian immigrants and blamed Roma people. There are situations when we call

the Roma "Gypsies", so that Romanians are not discriminated against by foreigners. It can be said that Romanians are racist.

In my period of study abroad, I heard different kinds of stereotypes related to Romanians. Having the chance to meet people from different corners of the world, I somehow researched their opinion about the country where I was born and some were even very direct. For example, in France, in addition to the correlation with Roma, they told me that Romanians imitate them, but in a pathetic way. The French accuse the Romanians of being very proud when they say "Thanks!" (From the French "Merci") and it is difficult to deny. France had a great influence in the architecture of the historical buildings that remained in Bucharest, but also in the Romanian culture. This is a negative stereotype related to the lack of originality of Romanians as a nation and obsession with validation. In Spain, in addition to the idea of Romanians as Gypsy people, the Spanish believe that the Romanians are uncared for because the Romanians who go to work have no time for them, and at the same time, they may not allow them. In addition to these stereotypes, there are many others ideas related to Romanians in almost every corner of the world.

✓ Language stereotypes: Does Romanian look like Russian?

Romanian is a language that belongs to the Romance languages. Among them, it ranks 5th in terms of number of speakers in the European Union, after Spanish, Portuguese, French and Italian. As we know Romania and Russia have a lot to share historically. The hope we have today is that the world we live in looks to the future and not to the past, unless you want to learn from your mistakes. In this future of globalization, people can live together if they recognize that values are shared, not imposed, accepted and assimilated naturally. Influence cannot lead to assimilation of influence, but to the consolidated affirmation of their identity, through its values. We can illustrate this statement with the influence of the Russian element in the Romanian space, with all that it implies. So, from here, the stereotype that the Romanian language is similar to the Russian one, but not many know that, as a Romanic language, it is similar to French, Spanish and Italian and that less than 10 percent of the words come from old Slavonic language. However, the Bulgarian, German and Turkish words in the Romanian vocabulary make it more difficult to understand the Romanian language.

### **Combating gender stereotypes in education and vocational guidance**

I did a research participating at different classes during the practice to be a teacher and not only, besides what I have observed at present, they reminded me of different moments that took place when I was a student, and that is me it makes me think that in terms of stereotypes nothing has changed since then.

✓ Attendance at different classes for observations

I resorted to classroom observation to explore how gender stereotypes are integrated into the school environment. We set out to discover directly from the source how gender stereotypes are reinforced or challenged in schools during class hours or breaks. Gender stereotypes may have been internalized by teachers and educators, which would exclude the possibility of them identifying or discussing the respective aspects of their behaviors. In addition, observation is the best way to explore behaviors. In this case, therefore, the external observer is best positioned and prepared to identify stereotypes and stereotypical practices. Furthermore, the observations provide the research team with examples of real incidents and behaviors in educational institutions, which may be the basis for the in-depth interviews later.

✓ Settling in desks

In most of the classrooms, the desks were arranged in rows, each one with two persons, most often face to face, boy to boy, mixed desks representing exceptions (friendship, rejection from colleagues or for "boy's confusion" after the teacher's words), in a few cases, they stayed in desk alone (situations in which the student/student was rejected by colleagues because of behavior or was simply choosing him/her and the arrangement of the class allowed).

During some subjects (chemistry, Romanian language, technological education) the students were organized into groups of 4-6 persons, formed according to personal preferences, without taking into account the membership of one sex or another.

✓ The atmosphere during the class

It was observed that the classroom atmosphere depends mainly on the teacher's ability to ensure a stable, disciplined and interesting climate. So:

- Teachers who combine authority with open, empathetic, involved communication are those whose courses are conducted in terms of order, attention, interest, involvement from the students;
- Teachers who are more permissive or, on the contrary, excessively authoritarian, who do not have effective communication with students (neither in terms of interpersonal communication, nor in terms of communicating specialized information), or those who only teach their lesson are those of whose courses are held in a state of mockery, disorder, inattention (students move to class during class, talk to each other) and lack of interest and involvement from students;
- The teachers who made connections between daily events and the lessons taught managed to capture the students' interest, to put their thoughts and to start useful discussions.

Also, it was observed that the atmosphere was also influenced by the volume of information that the students have to write during the hour. Thus, at math classes, at some Romanian classes, at courses for which there is no book and learning is based exclusively on the notes taken during the class (ex. safety and health at work, technological education and locksmith), the atmosphere was, usually, dominated by silence, the students being busy with writing. In none of the classes I attended did I notice a negative, tense atmosphere, regardless of the subject taught.

✓ Teachers

Of all the classes attended, only two were taught by male teachers. There were no differences between the teaching method, the interaction with the students, the involvement in activities, the interest in the subject, from a gender perspective.

From the point of view of communicating with the students, it was noted that most of the teachers used general addressing forms, most often not mentioning the students' names. For example, when they asked questions, they did not nominate specific persons to answer, but addressed the whole class, leaving it to the students' discretion whether or not to answer or simply indicate the person to answer by indicating with the finger or the nickname "you" - "Hey, what's the reason you not writing? Let's help him!"

There were also some teachers who constantly used the first names of the students in their interactions. There were those teachers who had a more open, collaborative, empathetic approach, involved with students. For example, "Andrei, explain to Mary what she has to do.", "Tell us, Ionica, what quality does the priest have - he sings beautifully, is he?" We want to hear him."

In many situations, the term "student" was used, which became a neutral/generalized addressing formula, even though the class was numerically dominated by girls (also noted by them). For example, "I want you not to look at your desk colleague and write your idea about ...", "I want to tell each student the wrong idea.", "A teacher succeeds in changing a lazy student, but an entire class of students lazy?", "Every student writes what he wants to know about ... and what he wants to

know." found that the direct address was used, on behalf of the family, when a student was alerted to a behavior considered inappropriate. The teachers made more frequent warnings for the boys, since they were the ones who most frequently displayed disturbing behavior, were mocking or asking questions.

When sanctioned behaviors were manifested by girls, teachers also intervened, with no major differences in attitude or severity compared to interventions against boys. In some classes, boys were drawn to disturbing behavior - to reduce noise, to revise their vocabulary and tone, and in the case of girls the reprimand was somehow related to their gender: "You are a girl, you should be quieter.", "This is not how a girl behaves."

At most of the classes attended, the attitude of the teachers towards the pupils was an equidistant one: they paid equal attention to the girls and boys, they asked to be involved in activities and to some, and others, without exhibiting discriminatory or biased behaviors.

Some teachers had an empathetic, collaborative, supportive approach to the problems and concerns of the students, but also authoritarian, able to impose order and discipline. Frequently, the impression generated was one of a team. It should be noted that these teachers facilitated the understanding of the contents discussed by frequent reference to examples from the students' daily lives (for example, equality of opportunities between women and men, love, healthy relationships vs. unhealthy relationships, marriage, respect, virtue, interview simulation, employment, etc.), by encouraging them to think critically, to make connections between the information they hold or encounter in daily life and those taught. This approach was most often observed in teachers who teach English, Biology, Romanian, Entrepreneurship and those who had the quality of class leader. Teachers who taught subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, German showed a somewhat more distant, less collaborative (or background) attitude, less interested in how specific information was transmitted, received and processed by students. The sensation generated was one of clear delimitation between the students and the teacher, the latter being focused on transmitting information, but not on the way of transmitting and receiving them, and very little interested in the relation and interaction with male students/female students.

As a rule, in all classes, students raised their hands when they wanted to answer. There were teachers who specially nominated students and students whom they assumed they could not answer and then they were reprimanded, naming "good" students, who were prepared. There were apostrophes such as "You were a bit lacking, that's why you don't know.", "Let's move on, we're wasting our time.", "Some of you know, some don't, get your hands on it and learn!"

- ✓ Elements of reinforcing gender stereotypes in teachers' behavior and discourse
  - When punitive behaviors were manifested by boys, they were told to reduce noise, revise their vocabulary and tone, and compared to girls, reprimand was somewhat related to their gender: "You are a girl, you should be calmer.", "That's not how a girl behaves."
  - One teacher stated that "Forestry is not for girls."
  - The headmaster to a student whose mother had come to school to talk about her daughter's situation: "Stop coaching football, you are in the eighth grade, you must learn, leave it for boys."
  - On projects presentation, the teacher says: "You are a girl, try to be more orderly. Look! (looks at a boy's book) so your project should be and he is a boy."
  - The teacher, while handing out student handouts, remarked: "I exhaust the boys if I give them such a hard time."; it can be deduced from this the teacher's perception that boys are less involved in the task and prefer to put less effort.
  - "The girls worked more carefully, the boys seemed to work in a stable, so the projects in the portfolio were wrinkled."

- "This girl is all day with that cube (Rubik), the boys do not understand, even though you say so ... at least she knows and does it as you blink."
  - When a student presents her project in front of the classroom, the teacher says: "This is how women dress, as beautiful as a picture."
  - "If you are talented, for example, girls when they sew, they embroider - because they do - they use the magnifying glass."
  - "Talk to the girls that they were more passionate."
  - "You are beautiful, but this is not the answer to the question ..."
- ✓ Elements of combating gender stereotypes in teachers' behavior and discourse
- After completing a task that involved practical activities (cutting portions of newspapers, collage, gluing) and creating misery, the Romanian teacher asked all the students to get involved in the cleaning activities, insisting that the boys should participate.
  - When the students worked in groups, the teacher also asked the girls and the boys to participate in moving and grouping the desks.
  - When it was necessary to delete the board, usually the girls volunteered to do it, in some cases the teacher suggested to the boys that they could do it.
  - The manager, who was also approved by the students in the lesson about trades, said that "there is no exclusive job, equally a woman and a man can work the same job", she also completed with "our skills do not hold and approved the student who said that "we have girls with us working in the lathe." "During the war, women took over all tasks."
  - The teacher connected with the theme of the lesson - the labor market and access to trades according to sex and the day they were on May 8 - Equal opportunities day between women and men. It provoked discussion: "Do we have the same chances? The same work schedule? Is there equality or should it be?"
  - At the lesson on love ("Romeo and Juliet"), the teacher held free discussions about relationships, marriage, decisions, communication. He drew a parallel between the time the song was written and present, provoking a debate on that topic: "How is it that you get married today at 14?"
  - During Romanian class, the teacher spoke about the condition of the woman, about the sacrifice, about the female victims (Ana from "Ion"): "To think in what literary works do we find women who have been abused?". When a student said that "the Romanian man goes home and assaults his wife!" He insisted on discussing this subject, drawing a parallel between the times of the past and the present.
  - When a student said that "You don't trust women gynecologists today, when a woman is pregnant she chooses to go to a gynecologist man - so I know, I heard it's better that way," the discussion went to the doctor, explained why women were getting harder in that area, the need to respect every man, and to give everyone a chance, regardless of gender.
  - Teacher to a student "Why were you ashamed to clean in front of the school? Anyone can do it clean, it's not something that only girls have to do. "He held discussions about mentality and why it is important for girls and boys to help each other.
  - At the time of biology, when talking about contraceptive methods, a statistic was introduced that showed the large number of minor mothers, from where interesting, open discussions started, which shows that such discussions have been carried out with class: "The child is the responsibility of both, not alone. That is why it is good to use contraception, "and" if the friend does not want a method of contraception, tell him pa! ". He also talked about consent and wanted those present to understand their meaning in a relationship.

- At the time of biology, when discussing a more delicate topic, the teacher did not skip the discussion, but said it in a more entertaining way, but that would catch the students: "Good thing I exceeded the moment stumble."

### **Conclusions**

Therefore, in fact, many of the stereotypes can help you understand a certain culture and know how to act. We must pay attention to the credibility of these stereotypes, in order not to lead to discrimination, racism, etc., or to show excessively careful behavior. Apart from certain cultural habits, traditions and gestures, rules of behavior and communication that others from other cultures can practice and appreciate if they are respected by the interlocutors of other cultures who could have learned from these stereotypes, the rest depends only on effective communication and understanding a culture by deepening it.

Also from the study we observe that gender stereotypes are felt in the attitude of the teachers in the classroom (through the remarks and the language used), as well as in the way they guide or guide the students in the process of finding the vocation. In addition, parents also reinforce ideas that lead to gender segregation in education and the labor market. A structural change is needed, which is possible by integrating the gender dimension; thus, both the school environment and the process of teacher preparation and counseling offered to students in schools, as well as textbooks they study, will be reviewed, in order to support gender equality and empower boys and girls to find and find their own the vocation follows, despite preconceptions about what women and men can and cannot do.

Interventions are needed to help identify and overcome gender stereotypes and to develop attitudes and behaviors based on gender equality in primary and secondary education, both among teachers and students, with a long-term goal. to achieve gender equality in the labor market. The teachers trained in this regard can play an essential role in the implementation of such interventions addressed to the general population.

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