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Gender Discrimination and Education Practitioners. Reality, Perception, Possible Solutions

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Abstract

This study aims at determining the extent to which Romanian prospective or current education practitioners are informed about gender discrimination (GD) problems in order to infer whether they are prepared to promote gender equality (GE) within and through schools. Drawing on recent Romanian legal provisions, statistics and research, and relating these aspects to EU and international developments in the area being investigated, a questionnaire-based survey was conducted, leading us to the conclusion that educators need being educated about GD in order to be able to promote GE, which could be achieved by means of a pre or in-service course.

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1. Introduction

Promoting gender equality (GE) has been one of the targets of Western civilization for more than five decades. Nevertheless, gender discrimination (GD) is still very much a big issue in many societies and, to a certain degree, this is a result of the way people get educated within the school system. School is 'deeply marked by gender principles, stereotypes and ideologies, the gender models it generates being very important for placing and

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integrating the individual in the society' (Grünberg & Ștefănescu, 2002), and, consequently, school education can play a dual role: on the one hand, it can be the main vector for promoting equality of opportunity, as a means of fighting against discrimination in general, and GD in particular, and, on the other hand it could represent a means of transmitting stereotypes and prejudice that might fuel and perpetuate inequality and discrimination. From this perspective, it is up to education practitioners to choose which role they would like to play, either forming individuals who shall think and act guided by tolerance, equal opportunity and non-discriminatory principles, or individuals who shall distortedly internalize gender-related aspects, thus maintaining inequality. Taking this into consideration, our paper is aimed at Romanian prospective or current education practitioners and their ability to promote GE, as we consider them to be the agents partially responsible for bringing about the necessary change in perspective. In part one, we briefly outline GD and GE in point of international, EU and Romanian legislation, statistics and research, the second part deals with methodology and research findings, and the final part presents the conclusions of our investigation, introducing possible solutions for the problems that have been identified.

2. GD and GE: some perspectives

As, 'with the concept of gender, the social construction of masculinities and femininities is emphasized rather than the biological definition of the sexes' (Young, 2001), GD is a type of discrimination that stems from the social differences that exist between men and women, leading to unjust treatment, by considering one superior to the other. The source for gender prejudice, stereotypes and roles goes far back in time, or, if we focus on the present, it could be identified in those gender-neutral, gender-blind or male-oriented policies and programmes, which maintain the gap between the legal provisions promoting GE and social reality, and, although it may affect both men and women, more often than not, women are prone to experience GD. For the purpose of our investigation, perspectives on GD and GE have been structured into three broad categories - legislation, statistics and research (at both international and European levels and in Romania) - with a special focus on the education practitioners' strategic role in disseminating GE.

In recent past, at international and EU levels, GD has mainly been approached from the point of view of the legislation that is needed in order to ensure the equal rights of men and women. Drawing on reports, international organisations have attempted to develop legislation favouring GE and to encourage states to endorse it. Thus, *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), adopted by the UN in 1979, strictly defined discrimination against women ('any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field' - Article 1) and invited states to adhere to it. More recently, Directive 2002/73/EC (2002) gives clear indications to what GD is: 'one person is treated less favourably on grounds of sex than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation' (Article 2, 2.); nevertheless, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), GE is not consistently defined in EU documents, suggesting that a simpler definition is to be preferred: 'equal share of assets and equal dignity and integrity between women and men, with the emphasis on women becoming equal to men' (EIGE, 2013). As far as our country is concerned, Romania has closely observed international and EU conventions and recommendations promoting GE. For example, Romania signed and ratified CEDAW in 1980 and the Optional Protocol to CEDAW in 2000; in 1995, Romania took part in the Fourth World Conference on Women and was one of the 189 countries that adopted *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, a global commitment to achieving equality, development and peace for women worldwide. Moreover, EU regulations regarding GE have been included into Romanian legislation (the anti-discrimination Act no. 48 of 2002 and Act no. 202 of 2002 on equality between men and women).

As for statistics, *The Gender Equality Index Report* (2013), published by EIGE, concludes that EU Member States have not yet managed to overcome gender gaps and that further efforts concerning equal treatment, positive action and gender mainstreaming are needed. In this report, in all the critical domains taken into consideration, Romania's score is very low in comparison with the European average, its rank in the country classification proving not only the existence, but also the high frequency of gender inequalities, generally to the detriment of women (EIGE, 2013). Moreover, according to *The Global Gender Gap Report*, published by the World Economic Forum

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