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## **THE IMPACT OF STEREOTYPES ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE ALBANIAN CONTEXT**

This article focuses on intercultural education and the negative impact of stereotypes on the teaching and learning of English in Albanian schools.

This is demonstrated through an analysis of stereotypes in English textbooks for 9<sup>th</sup>-grade school students and the impact they have on the learners’ English language acquisition.

Today, intercultural education is one of the best ways for creating greater possibilities, for reinforcing common relationship and respect towards different cultures that exist in multicultural societies.

Cultural elements are not universal; therefore they cannot be transmitted in an integral way. Stereotypes interfere in this process. What English teachers need to transmit to their students through English textbooks, is the way they can perceive individuals belonging to other cultures, so that not to create wrong stereotypes.

Cultural stereotypes are very important and they affect intercultural communication. They are a generalization of a certain culture, but not every group within a culture shares the same perceptions.

Foreign language teachers have to deal with many dilemmas; to face stereotypes, or to ignore them? To deal with them directly or to find the proper elements which indirectly make them disappear?

In this article, some strategies for challenging stereotypes in English classes are presented.

The paper provides an analysis of stereotypes in English textbooks for 3<sup>rd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>-grade students. These teaching resources influence the ideas and concepts that learners have about themselves and about the others. The analysis of stereotypes in English textbooks is done based on referring criteria of texts and illustrations. The characters and their visual representation in textbooks influence the creation of values.

A classification of the stereotypes is also proposed. It is noted that intercultural education helps students to develop an understanding of the world in which they live, to get to know other realities, to accept changes positively and to encourage positive attitudes, behaviours and values in order to challenge stereotypes.

**Key words:** *stereotype, English textbooks, intercultural education, acquisition process, Albanian context.*

### **1. Communication and cultural stereotypes.**

Globalization, no matter how we define it, is present in the classroom. We see it in the diversity of ideas and cultures which our students bring along with them. We also see it in the various technologies we use to enable teaching and learning.

Globalization, in other words, opens up various ways of teaching and learning because teachers and learners come from diverse backgrounds.

Communication is influenced by culture. Culture shares beliefs, ethics, and behavior of individuals or groups in a society. These cultural values, when decoded through stereotypes, are not always accurate and, in many cases, lead to misunderstandings.

Cultural elements are not universal, which makes it difficult to be transmitted in an integral way. Stereotypes affect this process. What teachers need to convey to learners through methods, is the way how to understand individuals belonging to other cultures, rather than to form wrong stereotypes about them.

There are different definitions of stereotypes. Stereotypes are generalized beliefs about certain groups of people based on their gender, ethnic group, religion, race. These are generalizations based on contacts or images that we have acquired from education, or socialization with others. Stereotypes are also defined as follows:

- By most historical accounts, Lippmann (1922) introduced the term 'stereotype' to refer to the typical picture that comes to mind when thinking about a particular social group.
- Stereotypes are cognitive schemas used by social perceivers to process information about others.<sup>1</sup>
- A general fixed image, a characteristic that many people believe represents a specific type of a person or something<sup>2</sup>
- A person, group, event or issue that is considered to set a fixed model or so, and that lacks individuality<sup>3</sup>
- Prejudice simple set of individuals to enable them to function in society.

Nowadays, we see a trend toward intercultural education. We seek a "dialogue of cultures". These teaching methods focus on how to communicate with others, the habits and characteristics of people.

Questions arise: What culture should be exchanged, and what should be done with stereotypes? How can teachers of English language contribute to the promotion of multilingualism and multicultures among citizens and how to cope with the lack of tolerance and xenophobia?<sup>4</sup>

Explaining cultural competence means to explain how to communicate successfully with people of other cultures. But what should be transmitted from this culture that is different, and how? Stereotypes possess one of the most serious challenges to the world we live; that of international and intercultural communication.

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<sup>1</sup> Hilton, J. L., & von Hippel, W. Stereotypes. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 47, 1996; 238

<sup>2</sup> Collins Cobuild Dictionary, Advanced learner's 4th edition, Express publishing, 2003; 1419

<sup>3</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 198; 1195

<sup>4</sup> Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001:4

There are not expected immediate changes in learners' acceptance of stereotypes, but different scales may be followed; to explore, comment, reflect, analyze, estimate, negotiate and to make decisions.

Cultural stereotypes are very important and will affect the cultural communication, but they are not necessary in all cultural circumstances. Stereotypes are generalizations of a culture that aims to transmit a message. This is not always accurate because not every group within a culture has the same perceptions. There is a relationship between culture and communication, and every culture has its own characteristics which are categorized into cultural stereotypes. These stereotypes provide information to groups and cultures of different countries. For example: Americans admire the achievements practicality and freedom, Albanians are hospitable and admire honor, patience and harmony in group.

On the other hand, cultural stereotypes are an effective way of cross-cultural communication. In cultural stereotypes, there can be many errors in interpreting the behavior of others, because in general people base their judgments on a culture based on stereotypical information. Thus, cultural stereotypes may not always be accurate; they can give a false statement about a group of individuals. For example not all Asians are lazy or not every black person is unable to perform a task. If people would take note of these inaccurate perceptions, they will treat all Asians or blacks deliberately and create unfair views and communication will end in misunderstanding. Despite these misunderstandings, cultural stereotypes can be useful and affect how people receive or provide information.

All cultures stereotype people from other cultures. They sometimes help to get general information about a new culture. Cultural stereotypes can not be static, because the culture is changing with the development of globalization. Culture will affect the start of a new relationship and maintain existing relationships. Stereotypes lead to prejudices.

## **2. National stereotypes and English language teaching.**

There are many dilemmas for the teachers of a foreign language; to face or to ignore stereotypes? To address directly to them or to follow other elements that lead to their disappearance? Below are presented some options for dealing with them, by referring even to textbooks examples.

### *Option 1 – Avoid them.*

For different communities are created different stereotypes, for example British are reserved and polite tea drinkers, Americans are constantly in a rush and do not have time. These are stereotypical assumptions and are inevitable in classrooms where English is taught. Another stereotype appears in the English textbooks of primary education “Access 3”, Albanian context; Maori people are known for their traditional dance and tattoos.<sup>5</sup>

Stereotypes come from:

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<sup>5</sup> Virginia Evans, Jenny Dooley Access 3 Student's Book; 2008;43

- Parents and family, media, friends, education, journey, laziness, fear, greed, superiority, lack of experience. Stereotypes appoint a certain individual according to a certain cultural type.

We all know the following statements:

- The British are not very sociable.
- Americans speak loudly.
- Germans are obsessed to the schedule.
- Italians are emotional types.
- French are romantics.

These kind of statements or prejudices, damage and do not take into account personal experiences. In Intercultural training, we try to make generalizations, for a deeper analysis of changes in regional cultures and personal cultural styles. It should be taken into consideration the fact that traditional cultural styles change over time. Britons today are generally more informal, and are much more emotionally demonstrative, than they were before.

One way to deal with stereotypes is to examine more deeply. A stereotype that is usually taken as negative, may be seen from the positive side. For example: British are cold, can be changed to "a majority of Britons want to retain their privacy.", or "Americans are noisy, it can be said : Americans are "sociable".

Personal experience is a factor which is very important. A person who has traveled abroad and has more international experience can possibly be different in cultural style from someone who is educated and has worked in his own country.

### *Option 2 – Explain culture*

This necessarily brings a positive attitude to one people over another. So solving the problem of stereotypes is, in filling the classroom with cultural themes. And learners can also be placed in a position of a witness in a sociocultural movie of a foreign world. In this way they are influenced by the foreign culture values.<sup>6</sup>

### *Option 3 – Stop the stereotypes*

A large part of the culture is a social construct, the product of the self-perception and others. When teaching culture the goal of learners has changed . They develop a third perspective, by getting an internal and external view of the source of foreign cultures and a critical perspective toward himself, others and world.

Are there factors that lead to changes of attitude? Actually negative attitudes can be changed during meetings people from different cultures. This view is shared by Byram<sup>7</sup>; one of the principles of teaching is that learners are encouraged

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<sup>6</sup> Kramsch, C.. Context and Culture in Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University 1993 ;12.

<sup>7</sup> Byram, M. and Zarate, G. Definitions, objectives and assessment of sociocultural competence. 1997;1

to become geographically mobile. It is important the critical teaching in order to make learners understand how a nationality is represented and how they represent themselves in the world.

So something in the foreign language teaching should be started with the exploration of learners' culture and knowledge, including stereotypes in ways that are challenging, supportive and affirming at the same time. Teachers have a responsibility to help learners find their voice and express their identity and also challenge ways of thinking.

So intercultural stereotypes must be challenged within the curriculum in foreign language classes by the teacher who sees himself as a transformer and educator.

Globalization is present in every classroom. It is seen in the diversity of ideas and cultures that learners bring with them. It is also seen in technologies that help us in teaching and learning process. Globalization creates different ways of teaching because teachers and students come from different backgrounds.

In the recent years, more and more teachers have stated their appreciation for the critical role of culture in the classroom and in this way they are trying to help in solving the problem of stereotypes and cultural intolerance through changes in the syllabus or curriculum.

During English classes and intercultural activities, in Albanian context, there are used 3 strategies for fighting and facing stereotypes:

- **Insert diversity in the learners' background.** There should be globalized characters in textbooks, for avoiding the creation of stereotypes. Nowadays reality is that in every workplace staff belongs to different cultures. For e.g. in the IV<sup>th</sup> grade in the topic of nationalities: Manuel is from Spain, Wendy is from Rome, Italy, Donald is from Scotland<sup>8</sup>. So learners acknowledge with particularities and characteristics of a certain country. Or Ireland traditional dish is Irish stew; the most well-known English sport is cricket. So cultural information from different countries is exchanged.
- **Avoid pronoun references to gender. The use of names referring to both genders.** Many names referring to both genders are used in the textbooks such as; Danielle, Bibi<sup>9</sup>; Louise, Lauren, Joyce, Neil. This strategy aims to raise awareness of the potential for gender stereotypes, in order to understand peoples' behavior. For e.g.: The name Lauren<sup>10</sup> is considered by the learners as female, because "it" cooks. When CD is listened, they found out it is a male. This shows that learners have the stereotype of cooking for women, thing that should be avoided. Terry<sup>11</sup> likes sport. Most of the learners related this name with male gender,

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Gray, Virginia Evans, *Welcome 1*; Express publishing 2008; 13

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Gray, Virginia Evans, *Welcome 2*; Express publishing 2008

<sup>10</sup> Virginia Evans; Neil O'Sullivan, *Click on 3*; Express publishing 2008; 59

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Evans; Neil O'Sullivan, *Click on 3*; Express publishing 2008; 116

being based on the idea that males do more sports than women. In “Access” textbook, VIII<sup>th</sup> grade, in:”Breaking the ice”, “Dealing with conflicts”, “Do you feel at home in your body?” both genders are equally considered.

Or in the dialogue: “Call of the wild“, Unit 5 E “Access 4”, VIII<sup>th</sup> grade, “Joe” and “Bill”. Without listening to the dialogue, just by reading the conversation in their text, learners believed that Joe is a female, being based on the scared nature of the female, but it turned out to be a male. This example is offered to avoid the idea of stereotype. Or the case when Faiza name is addressed as male, because during a dialogue “it” interrupts the participants and fights for" his "point of view, by displaying features such as aggression and power. Once learners understood more deeply, they were more critical of their assumptions about gender stereotypes. They went mainly from numerous experiences of theirs that men are more aggressive from the nature and women less aggressive. So their judgments are based on stereotypes.

- **Diversify each student’s patterns of communication.** Reality shows, that as individuals, we possess not only a style of speaking or writing, which means that there is a complexity of the theoretical models within individuals. They are able to be direct and indirect. For example, a Filipinas who is known as indirect in his conversations and in writing, has also in his repertoire rude talk depending on the situation, which according Kubotes (1997) is called " rhetorical variety " because of the tendency of a certain group to demonstrate a variety of styles and models.

There are dialogues where women in a higher social position interrupt the conversation. This case demonstrates how a complex set of communication associated with a particular person, force learners to think more about the individual that have to assess and analyze. This is a simple strategy to combat stereotypes in general. The encouragement of learners to think carefully about others before you judge them, force them to focus on individual skills levels. It forces people to look beyond the group and in its place to see people as unique individuals.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hamilton, D.L. & Crump, C.A Stereotypes. Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology (2004) ; 484

## THE STUDY

### 3. Analysis of stereotypes in the textbooks of 3rd – 9th grades, Primary education, Albanian context. ( Express Publishing; Welcome 1, Welcome 2, Access 1, 2 , 3, 4, Click on 3)

Dealing with stereotypes in English language teaching – learning process, is a crucial issue. It is seen more concretely in an analysis, classification and observation with some widely used textbooks in Albanian Context, Primary education.

These textbooks, are created between the efforts of many people, including teachers, editors, writers, testers, illustrators, directors, directors. These teaching resources influence the ideas and concepts that learners have about themselves and others. Learners should see positive experienced, supportive and encouraging images of themselves, their families, ethnic cultural and social groups during the learning process.

Good teaching resources should encourage learners to be aware and appreciate their differences between themselves and others. Specifically in the textbooks that were taken into the analysis are observed the following issues:

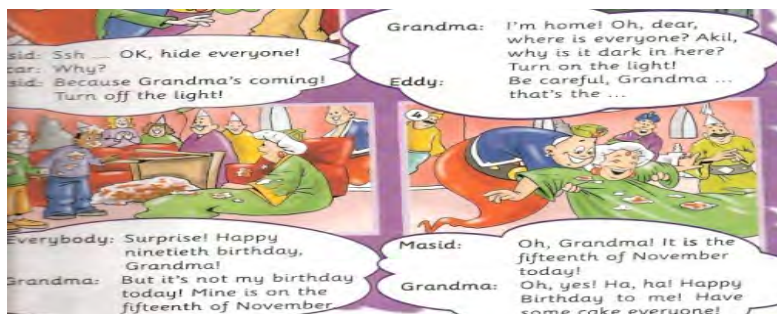
– Males and females are presented with equal respect, are illustrated in equal number and equal importance. They appear in a variety of commitments, activities and career, beyond stereotyped representations, they are shown making contributions to the community, taking physical and mental roles, featuring successes or failures, exhibit a wide variety of human emotions, and emerge as active and responsible parents.

– Cultural, social, ethnic groups, their customs and beliefs, are presented with respect. They are seen active in a range of professions and commitments, and are recognized for their contributions to the community.

– Old age, is displayed in a variety of activities and commitments, as well as making an active, productive and social life. (These are shown in many topics, not only in the written text, but also in pictures)

– Children appear to be able to make decisions, give advice or solve problems, explore and evaluate social and personal issues.

– People with disabilities and even the elderly are given the same kind of activities as normal people. They are introduced with respect in a range of activities. (Welcome 2) *pg. 55. Picture 1.*



Picture 1.

Roles in the family include a wide range of relationships among old people, parents, spouses, adopted children and ethnic parents from different cultures.

Based on the way stereotypes are displayed in the textbooks, I have made a classification of stereotypes:

### Racial Stereotypes

For example: American Indians in cowboy movies are seen as severe and ready for revenge. In *Access 4*, pg.95, this stereotype is broken by conveying a positive message. In *Welcome 2*, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, appear different characters; white people, black, Chinese, in order to educate young children to make a friendship with others belonging to different cultures. (picture 2)



Picture 2.

**Gender stereotypes.** Housework is divided equally between men and women. *Access 4* fq. 7; pg. 106, In the picture below, it is seen that both are involved in doing them. (picture 3)



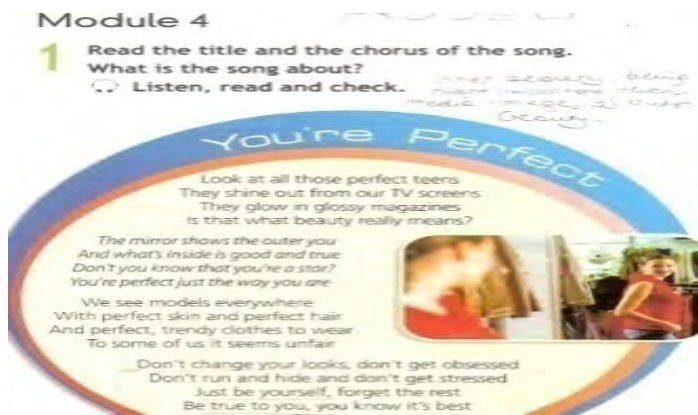
Picture 3.



In pictures illustration there is an equal number in male and female appearance and jobs without gender difference. *Access 4 pg. 40, "Self esteem" pg. 79.*

However there are rare cases, that stereotype is present. In *Access 2.pg. 14*, there is the girl doing housework. Or it is shown that females are more inclined in reading magazines and in the world of showbiz: "*British teen magazine*", pg. 45 *Access 3.*

In sport activities, males play a larger role compared to females *Access 3, pg. 99*. Or in *Access pg.70, Access 4 pg. 109* appears the stereotype of self care, beauty, mirror, – all these characteristics for females. Picture 4



Picture 4.

Another example of gender stereotype is on "*Click on the topic*", "*Lost in the jungle*". Males are more inclined to adventures and cope with difficult situations pg. 32.

**Age stereotypes.** In old age there is the stereotype of oblivion. In *Welcome 2 (pg.55)*, Masid's grandmother character.

Females are more well – organised compared to males. (*School bazaar pg. 67, Welcome 2*)

In *Access 4, pg.118, pg. 123*, there is an involvement of all ages, in everyday activities; eating in restaurants, visiting museums, so every age is involved in social life and make an active life.

**Professional stereotypes** .Girl express desire to be firewoman, and dealing with the danger. Picture 5.



Picture 5.

In *Click on textbook*, pg 110. Both genders are involved in the sport of skiing.  
Picture. 6



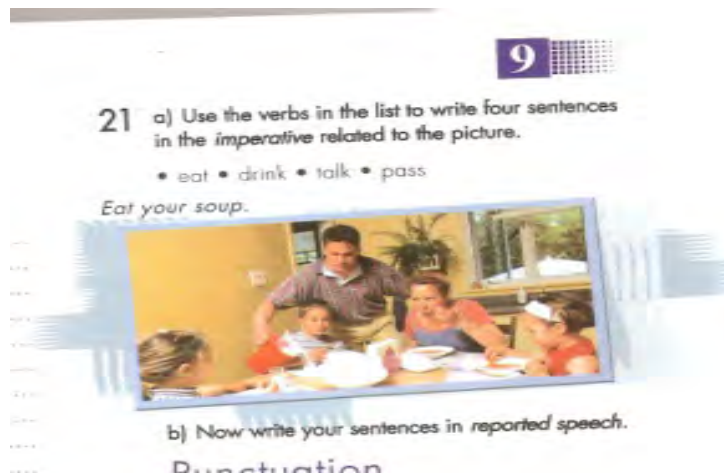
Picture 6.

There are many female heroines and not only male heroes. (*Access 4* pg. 94 pg. 27)



learner and the stereotype that “males “or are inventors. pg.125 – 128

**Stereotypes of roles in the families.** They include a wide range of relationships among old age, parents, spouses and adopted children. In *Access 1* pg. 45 "My family", pg 43 *Simpson*, pg. 38; there is an avoidance of stereotypes that only women work with children, but men are very engaged in their education as well; *Access 3* pg. 14, *Access 4* pg. 30 ; In picture 8 in *Click on* pg. 115 father serves dinner for his family.



Picture 8.

### National stereotypes.

Chinese tradition appears in *Access 2* pg. 26. British like and respect privacy, they like conversation on weather, TV, food. *Access 4* pg. 15.

### 3.1 The criteria of stereotypes analysis in Express publishing textbooks in Albanian context.

Analysis of stereotypes in textbooks is based on a set of criteria that refer to texts and illustrations. Visual and characters' representations influence in the creation of values, by referring to the roles of males and females.

In these methods there is an equal percentage of both sexes involved in various educational topics.

– Text messages transmit the vision of a society that gives equal opportunities to male and female development. Both sexes appear equals in decision making.

– Characteristics of individuals presented in the textbooks on various topics such as race, ethnic group, gender, religion, physical ability in most cases do not affect the identification of their typical behavior. Men and women appear with the same frequency and with equal status. The language used is the one that does not discriminate genders.

– Roles and tasks carried out by women and men in the family or community have the same space and value. Students do not find in textbook patterns of formation burdened with stereotypical gender culture. Presentation of the two sexes is in proportion. There is dynamism in the presentation of women image in the text, there is no gender dilemmas situations. There is a wide range of gender roles, which are equally represented in both feminine and masculine experiences. There are tasks and situations that help learners to socialize with the roles of both genders.

– The illustrations represent the lives of girls and boys both in urban and in rural areas. Professions fit to the reality and do not adhere to traditional stereotypes.

#### 4. Conclusions

There is a relationship between culture and communication, and every culture has its own characteristics which are categorized into cultural stereotypes. These stereotypes provide information to groups and cultures of different countries. Communication is influenced by culture. Culture shows beliefs, and behavior of individuals or groups in a society. These cultural values decoded to stereotype, are not always accurate and in many cases lead to misunderstandings.

Besides language, intercultural communication focuses on social qualities through models and cultures of different groups of people. It also involves understanding different cultures, languages and customs of people from other countries. During intercultural education is the inevitable stereotypes' appearance.

Nowadays, we see a trend toward intercultural communication. We seek "the dialogue of cultures." So teaching methods should show learners how to behave with others and what are the habits and characteristics of a nation.

Teachers of foreign language have to choose those stereotypes, whose values they want to convey, because stereotypes are impossible to be avoided completely in teaching a foreign language and in culture exchange. Teachers try to establish a connection and inter-cultural exchange among learners, through the transmission of knowledge during English classes, trying to avoid negative stereotypes.

Learners come to understand that their customs, their ways of thinking, their lifestyle, are possible response to the world around them; there are other realities which are neither good nor bad but simply are different. Societies need each other, to be known, to be familiar, to be open to risks and face the change, to understand the realities that are different from ours. Learners gradually become aware through cultural activities that textbooks offer, that each culture presents the positive aspects which we try to adapt even in our culture, as well as negative aspects which we criticize and try to avoid.

The teaching practice analyzed in the study, brought the issue of national stereotypes. It results that stereotypes should be challenged in the Albanian content and in the curriculum. This can be challenged by being put into the focus of learners and by teaching methods as a way of avoiding stereotypes.

Although there is a general tendency towards avoiding stereotypes, it is impossible to avoid them completely. Stereotypes represent a challenge both for the learner and for the teacher, because the issue of stereotype in the foreign language classroom is the way of a change in behavior. However, learners should move gradually towards understanding the stereotypes – to acquire knowledge and then acknowledge their harmful existence. They should try to recognize and accept people from foreign cultures, to create a dialogue between them and not to create a negative idea by making generalizations and stereotyping. After all, to have an idea for another is to create a cultural community.

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## BIO

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