A Stigmatising Stereotype or a Universal Gap in Expectations? Lessons in Mathematics in the Perception of Polish and Ukrainian Students

Abstract

Referring to the results of the authors' own research published in The New Educational Review (Turska, Bernacka 2010; Turska 2011), this article attempts at competitive verification of a hypothesis that explains differences in the perception of a mathematics teacher by Polish male and female students in view of a popular stereotype that Mathematics is a domain for males. It was assumed that diverse perceptions may result from different interpersonal expectations of the two genders. A comparative study carried out on a group of Ukrainians, established in accordance with the principles of ecological validity, seems to further substantiate the stigmatising effect of the stereotype in Poland.

Keywords: stereotypes, mathematics as a domain for males, interpersonal expectations.

Introduction

The majority of the students at technical universities in Poland are male. The preponderance of male students who major in strictly technical fields of study closely linked to mathematics (e.g. mechatronics) can be as high as 98% (Siwińska 2011). Perspektywy, a non-government educational foundation, was the first to undertake measures to counteract the prevailing trend. The “Girls for Engineers” programme, implemented in 2006, is today a recognised permanent feature of technical university recruitment campaign. In 2009 the programme, conducted