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Authors
Berberena, Tabea
Wirzberger, Maria

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Unveiling unconscious biases and stereotypes in students: The necessity of self-reflection in Higher Education

Tabea Berberena
University of Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany

Maria Wirzberger
University of Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany

Abstract

Preparing the next generation for an ever-changing environment is of utmost importance in Higher Education. Though cultural diversity is highly prevalent in modern societies, (implicit) biases, stereotypes and racism maintain a persistent yet mostly overlooked part of everyday life. Many students are not aware of their biases. Hence, it is imperative for them to undergo a critical self-reflection process about their beliefs and (unconscious) biases. To induce this process, raise awareness and confront them with potential (unconscious) biases and stereotypes, 404 university students in teacher training and vocational education completed an Implicit Association Test (IAT) on skin color before watching a lecture discussing biases and stereotypes. The preliminary results show a variety of reactions after taking the test, ranging from denial and anger to discomfort and surprise. We will discuss possibilities to support students in leveraging the resulting cognitive dissonance as an opportunity to begin their individual self-reflection process.