





Article

# Discrimination of the Gypsy Population in the University Environment

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**Abstract:** The Roma population is one of the most discriminated social groups. Ignorance of their culture, traditions, etc. generates prejudices and stereotypes that hinder the processes of intercultural coexistence. The aim is to make the Roma people visible and to intervene in the university population, promoting intercultural and inclusive learning spaces to reduce behaviors that generate inequalities. Students from the University of Valladolid were involved, 1255 students in particular, distributed in control and experimental groups. The instrument consists of 40 closed questions and one open-ended. A quantitative analysis was carried out in the anti-Gypsy attitudes categories with *t*-tests. Item to item differences were not significant in categories A, B and C, but there were differences in D between the experimental and the control groups, which confirms important trends in the target population. Prejudices towards the Roma population continue to exist. University students who receive training have fewer prejudices than students who do not, although other variables can influence the process. Of the students, 72.2% are disturbed by the same negative behaviors, regardless of the ethnic group, and half of them are disturbed by behaviors based on prejudices. It is confirmed the need for preventive interventions to avoid the establishment of erroneous beliefs about the Roma community.

**Keywords:** 2030 agenda; discrimination; gypsies; intercultural education; university

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updates

Academic Editors: Ahmed Bawa Kuyini, Maxwell Pephrah Opoku, Ajay Kumar Das and William Nketsia

Received: 1 November 2024

Revised: 10 December 2024

Accepted: 21 December 2024

Published: 26 December 2024

**Citation:** Aparicio-Gervás, J. M., Carbonero-Martín, M. Á., Valdivieso-León, L., & Vázquez-Ramil, R. (2025). Discrimination of the Gypsy Population in the University Environment. *Education Sciences*, 15(1), 16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15010016>

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## 1. Introduction

Since their migration from the Punjab to European lands at the beginning of the 11th century, three major milestones mark the history of the Gypsy people in their relationship with Spanish society: their arrival in the Iberian Peninsula in 1425 (Aparicio & Delgado, 2017), their migration towards “New World” in the late fifteenth century on the third voyage of Christopher Columbus, accompanied by the diffusion across the island of La Española (Gómez et al., 2000) and finally their legal recognition as Spanish citizens in the 1978 Constitution (Aparicio & Tilley, 2014). A process that has its origins in the Punjab region, as confirmed by linguistic research initiated after the work of Johann Christian Christoph (1782), which demonstrated grammatical, phonological and lexical similarities between the Roma language and the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European languages. Subsequent linguistic studies have revealed correspondences among Romani, Hindi and Sanskrit, confirming not only the origin of the Roma people in the Punjab region but also the migration movement to the West. A migration that has its origins in the confluence

of the deterioration of their social structure, the invasion of the Mughal emperors at the beginning of the 11th century (Ramírez-Heredia, 2000), and the Islamic expansion towards the East. These events culminated in the arrival of the Roma people at the Iberian Peninsula half a millennium later, in 1425. Evidence of this migration in Europe first appears in a Georgian hagiographic text, the Life of St. George the Athonite, in the monastery of Iberon on Mount Athos, around 1068 (Fraser, 2005). Later, as early as 1611, their presence is documented in the work of Sebastián de Covarrubias, "Treasure of the Castilian or Spanish Language", in which it is stated that the Roma originated from the far reaches of the Turkish Empire. Their migratory process continued westwards, causing contact and cultural clashes with numerous peoples and cultures that gradually incorporated successive linguistic adaptations into Romani. It is this linguistic evidence that has made it possible to construct part of its history. A history that will also be transferred to the New World, starting with Christopher Columbus' third voyage to America. All of this accompanied by a tale of persecution, hate and discrimination makes it remarkable that they continue to coexist within society. Despite being Europe's oldest, most numerous and historically discriminated cultural minority (Rodríguez, 2000), with the highest rates of social rejection (Díez, 2005). These historical conditions, in turn, reinforced their cultural traditions and strengthened the group cohesion, establishing links and mechanisms of survival (Aparicio & Ibáñez, 2023); mechanisms that even today, on some occasions, form part of their collective imagination, often acting as factors of social exclusion (Galletti, 2021). Likewise, we cannot forget the countless persecutions and hard imperial decrees (Gómez, 1993), which prevented strategies of coexistence with other social groups, causing almost their complete disappearance. In our days, there is still a lack of knowledge about their culture, traditions, codes and customs (Martín, 2018), a fact that does not facilitate the implementation of strategies for intercultural dialogue (Sánchez, 1986). Some of these traditions and codes can be seen in the classical works of Borrow (Borrow, 1932), Fraser (2005) and Leblon (1993), and developed from a different perspective of analysis in the investigations of San Román (1996), that introduces a new social dimension of racism, supported by a discourse on alterophobia. Despite all this, the Roma identity continues to cling to cultural links marked by survival strategies (Aguirre, 2008), which give rise to rejection and social intolerance among the majority population; an identity that presents itself to us as another example of a syncretic practice in the relentless struggle against adversity and rejection, hidden within cultural essentialism (Delgado & Aparicio, 2018).

The Spanish Gypsy population is very young, with approximately 750,000 people (Día mundial de los Romá [World Day of Roma people], 2022), with a great demographic potential and an incipient interest in education, which is slowly but progressively penetrating the university environment. Despite this interest, the figures are insufficient. In the compulsory education stage, 95% of Roma children are already in school, but only 1% enter university. This drastic percentage reduction is the origin of their low vocational qualifications and, consequently, of their precarious employment and weak economic situation, causing greater difficulties in their integration/inclusion social strategy, which is probably one of the causes of anti-Roma behavior. Antigypsyism is nothing more than racism in disguise, a hate crime, which stems from poverty. Poverty is caused initially by a nomadic culture that neutralizes the stability and consequent educational possibilities of the individual and triggers a low professional qualification and an economic deterioration that forces them to live in marginality and social exclusion. This marginality and social exclusion, adorned with their own identity traits, which are really survival mechanisms, provoke anti-Roma attitudes. In other words, it is born of racism rooted in the severe social stigma that poverty generates. This impoverishment causes a deeper social divide in times of neoliberalism, as stated by Taba (2020). Neoliberal policies, accompanied by reductions in public spending,

further deepen the problem of marginalization, leading to more poverty that prevents access to decent housing and forces the Roma community to settle in marginal environments with such precarious living conditions that they impede any process of social integration and provoke an effect of cultural concealment. This situation is also seen by the majority community as a characteristic inherent to the Roma identity, when it is nothing more than the consequence of a neoliberal society that has generated a deep social inequality that affects the most vulnerable populations. This fact has led to social resistance mechanisms that have sometimes generated false prejudices and stereotypes.

Despite the coexistence of more than five hundred years with the majority population, the Roma people remain as the ethnic minority that suffers the greatest social rejection. The antigypsyism is reflected in normalizing attitudes that affect not only the perceptions and opinions of the general population but also the media, as pointed out by Cortés (2021) and Hadziavdic (2012), whose statements (from the latter) appeared in the newspaper *El Correo de Andalucía* (The Andalusia Courier) and were published in the journal *Nevipens Romani* in 2022, where it was noted that one out of every four young people in Spain had racist attitudes, hatred and discrimination towards the Roma population. In addition, they expressed their wish not to coexist with this social group, nor that they should be given positions of responsibility in work or teaching. However, integration/inclusion process must be a two-way process, right?

This hate speech is contrary to the objectives pursued by the UN General Assembly through the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that must be implemented by 2030 ([Resolución A/RES/70/1 Transformar nuestro mundo: La Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible \[Resolution A/RES/70/1 Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development\]](#), 2015). The Spanish Council of Ministers, on 2 November 2021, approved and submitted to the European Commission the “National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma People 2021–2030” ([Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030, 2021](#)), which describes the guidelines set out in the European Strategic Framework 2020–2030 for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma population and the new rules of the European Funds for the period 2021–2027, which, based on the learning and the balance of national strategies over the last decade, propose an approach to state efforts to fight against discrimination on ethnic or racial grounds in different socio-economic areas. In this sense, research is framed within the strategic lines of the axes raised: social inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as four of the seventeen SDGs, “to pursue an inclusive and quality education, promoting learning opportunities”, “to reduce inequality”, “to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” and, finally, “to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies”. These goals, pursued by the society of the 21st century, are embedded in the formation of personal values and attitudes, being the central axis of research. A society immersed in a multicultural process that stimulates social integration processes and moves towards a social model of coexistence in which all the existing social heterogeneity must have its place ([De Gainza, 2011](#)). Thus, this research seeks to be inserted into the very philosophy that emanates from the objectives of Agenda 2030. It is a question of encouraging inclusion to build a social model of coexistence ([Aparicio & León, 2022](#)). In our case, the aim is to move from integration to inclusion and from coexistence to harmony. Ultimately, being able to move forward from multiculturalism to interculturality ([Aparicio & León, 2018](#)). This change is semantically simple but socially very complex. To achieve this objective, it is necessary to make the Roma community visible and respected and, in turn, to identify and eliminate prejudices and stereotypes.

This big step must be taken starting from education ([Abajo & Carrasco, 2004](#)), and within this field, from the university education, as it is the most difficult for the Roma

community to access. For this reason, we think that the greatest impact should be made in the university context by covering teachers' training and linking it to social services because it has a major impact on the process of integration and/or inclusion of the Roma population. It has been considered a priority to initiate this research in the field of knowledge with greater influence on the process of social inclusion of the Gypsy community in the grades of Early Childhood Education, Primary and Social Education because these professions are the true catalysts of processes that generate coexistence strategies and promote spaces of intercultural relationship (Gutiérrez, 2016), approaching them from a multidisciplinary and transversal perspective.

Recent research supports effective results by using strategies that generate behavioral changes and enhance a positive view towards heterogeneous cultural groups in the university context (Urbiola et al., 2014). A university context in which the Gypsy community is beginning to enter.

### *Objectives and Hypotheses*

The education for tolerance that is pursued aims to generate spaces of inclusive coexistence by eliminating prejudices and stereotypes (León & Aparicio, 2022). The following objectives are set out in this perspective:

1. To discover knowledge and opinions about the Roma community in the university context.
2. To identify prejudices, stereotypes and attitudes of antigypsyism in university spaces.
3. To establish intervention strategies that facilitate the visibility of the Roma community at the University.

From this perspective, two hypotheses arise:

- a. The experimental group, which has studied the subjects "Intercultural Education", "Immigrants, ethnic minorities and intercultural education" and "Education for peace" in the grades of Early Childhood Education, Social Education and Primary Education, studying contents about Roma culture, will offer a broader and more objective knowledge of this community.
- b. The experimental group will show less prejudice, evaluating the Gypsy community more positively than the control group, which has not studied these subjects or worked on contents about Gypsy culture.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### *2.1. Methodological Design*

This is a quasi-experimental study involving an experimental group and a control group, covering both the objective measurement of attitudes and the in-depth analysis of personal perceptions and beliefs. Participants were not randomly assigned to groups; instead, their allocation was based on whether they were enrolled in courses that contained topics related to Roma culture and the reduction of prejudice toward ethnic groups.

The methodological design of this study is mixed, sequentially explanatory and exploratory in nature. The integration of statistical analysis with qualitative categorization facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, thereby supporting the development of intervention strategies aimed at promoting inclusive coexistence and reducing prejudices and stereotypes.

### *2.2. Sampling and Participants*

The sampling method used in this study was non-probabilistic and of convenience, as participants were selected based on their availability and accessibility within the university context. This type of sampling is common in exploratory and quasi-experimental

studies, particularly when the aim is to gain a preliminary understanding of attitudes and perceptions within a specific population (in this case, university students).

According to the data provided by the University of Valladolid, through its transparency portal, the number of students enrolled in degrees in the year 2022–2023 amounted to 18575. Approximately 43% of the total student population belongs to the area of Social Sciences and Law. Furthermore, around 34% of these students have studies linked to the area of education. In general terms, 82.5% of these students are between 18 and 24 years old, with a modal value of 21 years. In addition, the gender distribution is unequal, with a higher number of female students.

In this context, the total number of students who were invited to participate in the study was 3169, with the following distribution: 932 of the Early Childhood Education Degree, 1659 of the Primary Education Grade, 332 of the Social Education Grade and 251 of the Social Work Grade. The minimum number of participants needed to make the sample representative of the population is estimated at 799, with a confidence level of 95% and an error margin of 3%.

A total of 1255 students agreed to participate in the study (86.5% women; 13% men; 0.5% others), belonging to the University of Valladolid, on the Campus of Valladolid (66.3%) and Palencia (33.7%).

The distribution of the sample by grades is as follows: 448 of Grade in Early Childhood Education (35.7%); 518 of Grade in Primary Education (41.3%); 101 of Double Grade in Primary and Early Childhood Education (7.9%); 81 of Social Education (6.5%); 107 of Social Work (8.5%).

The total sample consists of a control group of 734 (58.5%) and an experimental group of 521 (41.5%), depending on the subjects they have studied and whether they have worked on contents related to the Roma population. In terms of inclusion and exclusion criteria of the sample:

- The experimental group is made up of students belonging to second, third and fourth courses of the Degree in Early Childhood Education of Valladolid, second course of the Degree in Social Education of Valladolid and third course of the Degree in Primary Education of Palencia. This group of students has studied the subjects “Intercultural education”, “Immigrants, ethnic minorities and intercultural education” and “Education for peace and equality”, which include contents related to Gypsy people and intercultural education.
- Control group is made up of students belonging to first year of the Degree in Early Childhood Education of Valladolid and Palencia, third year of the Degree in Early Childhood Education of Palencia, first year of the Grade of Primary Education of Valladolid, Double degree of Primary and Early Childhood Education of Palencia and second year of the Social Work Degree of Valladolid, which have not received content related to Gypsy People and intercultural education.

### 2.3. Instrument

In the absence of validated instruments that measure the prejudices and stereotypes towards the Roma population by the majority population in Spain and having as reference the previous categorization by [Jiménez-Rodrigo and Sánchez-Muros \(2020\)](#), it was decided to draw up an ad hoc questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 41 questions.

The classification proposed by Jiménez-Rodrigo and Sánchez-Muros identifies three key categories that facilitate the assessment of the extent to which anti-Gypsy attitudes, experiences of discrimination and situations of social exclusion emerge within the university context in relation to the Roma population. For the purposes of this study, a fourth category has been introduced, focusing on the knowledge of the history and culture of the Roma

community. Consequently, the framework employed in this research consists of four main categories, which are further subdivided into a total of 14 distinct subcategories (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Categories and subcategories related to antigypsyism attitudes.

Category	Subcategories
A. Identification of anti-Gypsy attitudes	A.1. Interpersonal rejection of Roma people A.2. Perception of social discrimination against the Roma population
B. Identification of experiences of discrimination	B.1. Ethnic-based harassment and violence B.2. Discrimination related to health B.3. Discrimination motivated by coexistence in educational spaces B.4. Discrimination related to housing issues B.5. Discrimination in daily interaction
C. Identification of social exclusion	C.1. Educational exclusion C.2. Exclusion from employment C.3. Economic exclusion C.4. Exclusion for social protection (positive discrimination)
D. Historical/cultural identification of the Gypsy community	D.1. History D.2. Traditions and culture

Based on these categories and subcategories, 40 items were created, using either a dichotomous response format or a 5-point Likert scale. The most appropriate response format was selected depending on the question. Additionally, an open-ended question was included to further complement the information gathered (see Table 2). The estimated response time is between 18 and 20 min.

**Table 2.** Questions regarding the categorization system.

Category	Sub-Category	Items
A	A1	Have you ever had any Gypsy colleagues?
	A1	Have you made friends with people from Gypsy community?
	A1	Would you be okay with any of your family members befriending a Gypsy person?
	A1	Would you be okay with any of your family members having a romantic relationship with a Gypsy person?
	A1	Do you act the same way with everyone around you, regardless of their ethnicity?
	A1	Does the social environment of a person act differently depending on his or her ethnicity?
	A1	Do you have contact with persons of Gypsy community in your academic, professional or leisure environment?
	A1	What do I feel when I am around people of the Gypsy community? Point out the emotion that most resembles the one you think you can feel.
	A1	Have you made friends with people from Gypsy community?
	A1	What is the attitude or behavior that most annoys you in the Roma people?
	A2	Do you think it is okay that a Gypsy person holds a relevant position in politics?
	A2	Are people in the Gypsy community discriminated against in different social spheres?
	A2	Is the Gypsy community involved in citizen participation processes?
	A2	Do the people of Gypsy community meet the basic standards of coexistence in different social areas?

Table 2. Cont.

Category	Sub-Category	Items
B	B1	Have you been harassed by people of the Gypsy community?
	B1	Have you been treated well by people of the Gypsy community?
	B1	Have you participated in actions of discrimination against people of the Gypsy community?
	B2	How much use do Gypsy people make of the health system?
	B2	Do the people in the Gypsy community have more health problems than the rest of the population?
	B3	In the field of education, are children of the Gypsy community treated equally with non-Gypsy children?
	B3	Do you think that Gypsy families are less involved in the education of their children because they suffer discrimination in the educational field?
	B4	Would you rent your house to a family of the Gypsy community?
	B4	Do people of the Gypsy community have more difficulty to access housing than the rest of population?
	B4	Do the families of the Gypsy community live in well-off areas?
B5	When I share a public space with people from the Gypsy community, what do I feel? Point out the emotion that most closely resembles what you feel.	
C	C1	Compared to the general population, what percentage of the Roma community do you think has basic education?
	C1	Compared to the general population, what percentage of the Roma community do you think has a higher education?
	C1	Is there truancy in the Gypsy community?
	C2	Compared to the rest of the population, do you consider that access to the world of work for people belonging to the Gypsy community is...?
	C3	How much income do the families of the Gypsy community have?
	C4	Do you consider that people belonging to the Gypsy community receive social assistance?
D	D1	Do you know where the Gypsy community originally came from?
	D1	Do you know in what century the Gypsy community arrived on the Iberian Peninsula?
	D2	What is the majority religion in the Spanish Gypsy community?
	D2	What is the original language of the Spanish Gypsy community?
	D2	Do the Gypsy people have any hymns?
	D2	When is World Gypsy Day?
	D2	What are the two colors that predominate in the Gypsy people's flag?
	D2	Can a Gypsy woman be a "peacemaker"?
	D1	How many years have the Roma community been persecuted in Spain?
D1	Juan de Dios Ramirez Heredia, president of the Union of the Roma People, is a renowned Gypsy. Do you know what he has done?	

#### 2.4. Procedure

Phase 1: Participant selection and group formation.

The study began with an in-depth analysis of Romani culture and the identification of values and attitudes that promote processes of intercultural coexistence. Based on this experience, the decision was made to investigate the prejudices and stereotypes held by university students, particularly those enrolled in academic programs related to education, regarding the Roma community.

Subsequently, different student groups were selected to form experimental and control groups. The experimental group consisted of students with whom knowledge related to Romani culture was actively taught. The control group, on the other hand, was composed of students who did not receive any specific educational intervention on the topic.

Phase 2: Development of the measurement instrument.

To measure prejudice and anti-Gypsy attitudes within the university community, a tailored questionnaire was designed, specifically created to address the objectives of the study. The development of this questionnaire was based on an extensive literature review, which helped to build the categorical framework that underpinned the formulation of the

questions. The questionnaire was specifically designed to assess students' perceptions and attitudes towards the Roma community.

Phase 3: Administration of the questionnaire and data collection.

With the approval of the teaching staff, different student groups were visited and provided with a web link and QR code, which facilitated easy access to the questionnaire. Students were also invited to participate through the virtual platforms of their respective university campuses. The questionnaire was administered via Microsoft Forms, an online platform that enabled efficient data collection.

The platform included a filter ensuring that participants agreed to take part in the study on a voluntary basis, with no coercion or financial compensation. They were also informed that the administration of the questionnaire would be anonymous and governed by the applicable data protection regulations.

Finally, the data were analyzed using appropriate statistical analyses and a rigorous qualitative categorization process.

Phase 4: Ethical approvals and compliance.

It is important to note that the study was authorized by the Ethics Committee (PI 23-3140 NO HCUV) and validated by the Data Protection Service of the General Secretary of the University of Valladolid, ensuring compliance with all relevant ethical and legal requirements.

Study Duration: The research was conducted over a period of 8 months, from 20 September 2023 to 30 May 2024.

## 2.5. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistical analyses, including the comparison of means through the parametric *t*-test for independent samples between the control and experimental groups, utilizing SPSS version 25 software. This allowed for the determination of whether significant changes occurred in the studied variables.

The qualitative data were analyzed following a structured approach. After reviewing the literature on creating a categorization system and thoroughly examining all 1255 responses, an initial version of the categorization system was developed. The categorization of the open-ended question "What attitude or behavior bothers you the most about Roma people?" was carried out using an etic method, where categories and subcategories of analysis were created from the information gathered (Hernández et al., 2006).

Initially, the potential categories and the survey were distributed to 9 expert evaluators specialized in Romani culture and ethnic groups from the fields of education, psychology, anthropology and pedagogy. The expert judges were selected based on pre-established criteria to ensure the quality of their feedback. These criteria included being part of the teaching and research staff of a Spanish university, working at different universities or research teams, and having at least one scientific publication related to the article's content. However, only 5 evaluators provided their feedback on the following aspects:

First, they were asked to assess the "degree of agreement" on 4 issues (from 1-disagreement to 4-agreement), obtaining the following average scores:

1. Is the presentation of categories appropriate? Mean = 3.8
2. Do you agree with the category names (labels)? Mean = 3.6
3. Are the categories well defined? Mean = 3.2
4. Do the examples obtained from transcripts illustrate the categories? Mean = 3.8

The average score of the expert assessments was between 3.2 and 3.9, with a Kappa value equal to 0.86 and a Kendall coefficient of 0.83.

Secondly, they were asked to answer the following questions. If they answered yes, they could explain their reasons by open reply:



1. Would change the name of some categories. What category is it, and what is your proposal?
2. Would you group some categories together? Which categories would you group and why?
3. Would you organize the categories differently? What is your proposal?

Following a thorough review of expert feedback, particularly regarding the renaming of categories B, D, and E, the necessary revisions were made, resulting in the final version of the categorization system, which includes seven categories. This system facilitates the organization of information related to prejudice and stereotyping against the Roma community.

Finally, the open-ended responses were analyzed inductively, identifying recurring patterns and grouping them into thematic categories that reflect the main areas of interest in the study.

The data were analyzed through appropriate statistical methods and a rigorous qualitative categorization process. Two members of the research team organized the 1255 experiences of discrimination, achieving 92.7% agreement. A third researcher then reviewed the categorization and resolved any minor discrepancies.

### 3. Results

Taking into account the objectives of the research, the results presented below indicate that the students participating in the study have limited knowledge of the Roma people and their culture. Their opinions are characterized by prejudice, stereotypes, and anti-Roma attitudes. The findings suggest that intervention strategies aimed at increasing the visibility of the Roma community at the university can help reduce these prejudices and stereotypes toward this ethnic group.

From the quantitative perspective, the observed difference between the control and experimental groups may be associated with specific curricular content related to intercultural education, with special emphasis on the visibility of Romani culture. We therefore consider that, from the framework of our research, cultural knowledge is the basis for the elimination of prejudices and stereotypes and the promotion of spaces for intercultural dialogue and coexistence. The absence of such knowledge exacerbates prejudice and stereotyping, thereby undermining processes of social integration and inclusion.

On the other hand, the statistical analysis of category D is presented, continuing in A, B, and C, to contrast the different measures between the experimental groups (who had worked on subjects with contents related to intercultural education and Gypsy culture) and the control (who lacked these subjects).

The analysis shows how in Category D, in the 10 questions related to the knowledge of traditions and Gypsy culture, statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$  \*;  $p < 0.01$  \*\*) between the control group and experimental group are observed in the *t* of student, except in the question related to the arrival of the Gypsy community on the Iberian Peninsula (see Table 3).

Continuing the quantitative analysis in categories A, B and C, *t*-tests were used to analyze the differences between the experimental and control groups, but these were not significant; although different and important trends occur that need to be confirmed by further studies.

In this sense, 95.7% of the sample is okay with a person of Gypsy ethnicity occupying a relevant position in politics.

Almost half, 44.2%, worked and/or studied with Roma people and had no problems, 52.9% never had any contact with the Roma population and only 2.9% reported some problems. It should be noted that more than half of the students have no connection with

the Roma community and, as a result, have experienced low cultural stress, which could have an impact on the decline in social rejection.

**Table 3.** Questions about knowledge of history, traditions, and gypsy culture.

Items	Correct Answer	Success Rate Depending on Group		<i>p</i> -Value
		Control N = 734	Experimental N = 521	
Do you know where the Gypsy community originally came from?	India	38.7	64.0	0.0334 *
Do you know in what century the Gypsy community arrived in the Iberian Peninsula?	XV	49.6	50.6	0.0629
What is the majority religion in the Spanish Gypsy community?	Evangelical	56.3	75.3	0.0083 **
What is the original language of the Spanish Gypsy community?	Romani	35.3	86.5	0.0113 *
Do the Gypsy people have any hymns?	Yes	36.1	82.0	0.0239 *
When is World Gypsy Day?	April 8th	63.9	87.6	0.0437 *
What are the two colors that predominate in the Gypsy people's flag?	Blue and green	64.7	77.5	0.0156 *
Could a Gypsy woman be a "peacemaker"?	No	13.4	53.9	0.0369 *
How many years have the Gypsy community been persecuted in Spain?	More than 200 years	47.1	60.7	0.0425 *
Juan de Dios Ramírez Heredia, president of the Union of Roma People, is a renowned Gipsy; do you know what he has stood out for?	Politician	45.4	58.4	0.0458 *

Note: The comparison of means through the parametric *t*-test for independent samples between the control and experimental groups (Significant *p*-value:  $p < 0.05$  \*;  $p < 0.01$  \*\*).

Differences are observed when asked whether they feel comfortable with a relationship of friendship or affection with Roma people. Almost all, 92.3%, of the students did not have any problems when they were in friendly relationships (although only 56.3% had one). The problem arises when the relationship is sentimental, which drops to 77.9%. The decline in cultural acceptance is noticeable as interpersonal relationships increase, and this will be more so in the university environment.

There is no discrimination based on ethnic origin, with 92.3% of respondents saying that the social environment often acts differently. The greatest degree of acceptance does not depend on an ethnic question but on the social environment of coexistence, hence the importance of influencing processes of intercultural coexistence.

The students think that few Gypsies have basic education (71.6%) and higher education (89.9%). Almost all (92.3%) of the respondents said that the reasons were school absenteeism and 88.9% that the families did not participate in the education and training of their children because they considered it to be unimportant. When asked whether they are treated in the same way as the rest of the student population within the educational field, opinions are divided (yes (49%) vs. no (51%)). The Roma community is often held responsible for its poor educational background, without considering the possibility of finding other responsibilities, such as that of the education system itself.

Of the respondents, 61.1% of the students say that it is quite difficult for Roma people to enter the labor market, although 32.7% believe their income is equal to the average of the population and 45.2% believe it is lower. The problem of access to the labor market is therefore a matter for concern. They claim that their economic capacity is not seriously affected because 70.7% of the students believe that they receive social assistance with a frequency "somewhat" or "much higher" than the average of the Spanish population. The

percentage data reflect the students' lack of knowledge of the average income of the Roma community and the process of granting social assistance. All this is also related to the fact that 72.1% of students think that Gypsy people have serious difficulties in accessing housing, and more than half say there are very few families living in well-off areas of cities (57.6%). The social environment, the neighborhood and housing, as we have pointed out, condition the processes of coexistence. It is remarkable that only 64.4% would rent their home to a Gypsy family, despite the difficulty of this option in the age group of the students.

Of the respondents, 73.6% said they had not been harassed and 76% said that they were treated well by Roma people. Surprisingly, 8.7% of the students admit to having participated in actions of discrimination against people from the Gypsy community. Despite not having been mistreated or harassed, 59.2% said that this ethnic group is belittled in different social areas, perhaps because 74.5% consider that it is "quite often" difficult to comply with the basic rules of coexistence.

When asked about their emotions or feelings when sharing space with people of Gypsy ethnicity, although 19.5% like it and 68.9% are indifferent to it, it is significant that 11.5% feel concerned.

Of the respondents, 52.4% think they are involved in citizen participation activities, rising to 83.7% in the electoral processes, as does the rest of the population.

Although 79.3% report that they have no more health problems than the rest of the population, they perceive a use between "quite" (61.5%) and "much" (15.9%) of the public health care system.

Finally, the last version of the new category system was used to continue data analysis (see Table 4). From a qualitative perspective, in the analysis of the short answer to the question What is the attitude or behavior that most bothers you about Roma people? Many of our students reported being bothered by the same behaviors of the Gypsy population as the non-Gypsy, and 28.8% were not bothered at all. It was observed that the transgression of social norms and disrespect (23.7%), together with the prepotent, aggressive and intimidating behaviors (18.3%), are what most displeases the students of this research. They also reject the habit of speaking out loudly (7.6%), as well as not going to school regularly (7.9%), their false perception of being underestimated (7.4%) and finally the persistence of a behavior considered sexist (6.3%), such as the lower participation of women in the world of work, the greater involvement of women in domestic tasks and childcare, or the young marriages.

**Table 4.** Categories of analysis of short-answer qualitative questions.

Code	Categories	N	Percentage
A	Transgression of social norms and lack of respect	297	23.7
B	Very loud tone of voice	95	7.6
C	They aren't involved in their children's education	99	7.9
D	Male culture	79	6.3
E	Preposterous/superior, aggressive/intimidating behavior	230	18.3
F	They think they are discriminated against, and they are not	93	7.4
G	They don't mind anything	362	28.8
	Total	1255	100

In addition, some relationships between different questions have been identified in the experimental group, as follows:

- "Yes" was answered by 97% when asked, "Do you think it is okay for a Roma person to hold a prominent position in politics?" and "Would you be okay with any of your family members having a friendly relationship with a gypsy person?"

- Majority, 93%, act in the same way with all people around, regardless of their ethnic origin, consider that the Roma community has school absenteeism; they are happy that their family members have a friendly relationship with Roma people and that a Gypsy person has a prominent position in politics. Even 55% of them would rent a house to a Gypsy family.
- Almost all, 97%, said they were happy to see a Roma person in a prominent position in politics, 93% of them doing the same with people around them regardless of their ethnic origin, 79% would be happy if one of their relatives had a relationship with Gypsies, 72% consider that Gypsies have basic education, and 62% believe that they have some difficulties in accessing the world of work.
- Just over half of respondents (55%) think that people in the Gypsy community are often discriminated against in different social settings, and they would, in turn, be friendly to Gypsies.
- All those who view favorably that a Roma person occupies relevant positions in politics and that their family members have a friendly relationship with people of this ethnicity also are 79% happy that they have a romantic relationship. The students are consistent, as 78% act in the same way with people around them regardless of their ethnic origin, reporting that they have not been harassed (74%) or mistreated (92%) by Roma. They also consider that it is quite difficult for them to access the world of work (62%), and 65% would rent their home to Gypsy families.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The three objectives set have been achieved, and the two initial hypotheses (a and b) verified, and it is therefore stated that work should be conducted on the need to include subjects with contents that highlight the social group, promoting educational strategies that facilitate the inclusion of all students in the university space; an inclusion and intercultural dialogue has already been demanded by [Sánchez \(1986\)](#) and reaffirmed by [Díez \(2005\)](#) and [Rodríguez \(2000\)](#) since the beginning of the XXI century.

The results show that university students are unaware of the most basic aspects of Roma culture. This lack of knowledge generates mistaken opinions and false value judgments that give rise to prejudices and stereotypes, leading to anti-Roma attitudes based on racist behaviors. The prejudices and stereotypes detected in the university environment are mostly not based on cultural rejection but on ignorance and poverty. This poverty is mainly generated by low professional qualifications and the consequences of a neoliberal society. In this sense, from the university sphere, we aim to generate educational strategies that facilitate the incorporation of Roma students and enhance their qualifications, improving their economic and social expectations. Intervention strategies in the university environment, supported by the inclusion of subjects with content related to the knowledge and visibility of the Roma people, confirm the beginning of a reduction in prejudice and the rejection of anti-Gypsy attitudes. These contents must be agreed upon by the Roma community itself, recognizing their identity and focusing on the enrichment that diversity represents as part of the common cultural heritage.

The social dimension of racism has been considered by overcoming the alterophobic discourse raised by [San Román \(1996\)](#). Despite encouraging progress, prejudices and stereotypes have been observed and reflected in the media, which was already reported by [Hadziavdic \(2012\)](#) and continued to be stated by [Cortés \(2021\)](#). These prejudices and stereotypes have been identified and eliminated through the construction of a social model of coexistence, as proposed by [Gutiérrez \(2016\)](#) and claimed by [Aparicio and León \(2022\)](#). A model that [Abajo and Carrasco \(2004\)](#) called for more than twenty years ago, yet not solved, must be considered from the point of view of education as an inclusive approach in

the university context (Urbiola et al., 2014). That is, a “theoretical corpus” that supports the pillars that allow us to implement the Sustainable Development Goals and which has not yet defined a concrete response. This is the path taken in this research, which aims to provide answers and possible solutions to the problems posed by the current theoretical discourse.

From a quantitative perspective, the statistical results of category D confirm that the students in the experimental group show significantly better knowledge of Gypsy culture and traditions than the control group, as the answers show, except for the question relating to the century in which the Roma population arrived on the Iberian Peninsula.

As can be seen from the results, and given that it is currently impossible to offer more detailed data for categories A, B and C, only trends confirmed in later work can be provided. The students in the experimental group showed a greater knowledge of Gypsy culture and traditions than the control group, and although not statistically significant, less identification of antigypsy attitudes and experiences of discrimination and social discrimination, presenting a greater predisposition to generate spaces for intercultural coexistence in which the Roma community is included.

From a qualitative perspective, one quarter of the students are bothered by the same negative behaviors regardless of the ethnic group to which they belong, and half of them are disturbed by behavior that is probably based on prejudices and stereotypes of the Gypsy population that cannot be generalized to the whole group. This is precisely what we must work on through preventive and corrective interventions that avoid the establishment of erroneous beliefs about the Gypsy community.

In this context, universities have a crucial responsibility to provide an educational offering that meets the diverse needs of a multicultural society (Cuadros & Chancay, 2021; De Santos, 2018). As institutions responsible for training educators and professionals who will occupy key positions across various social domains, universities are fundamental agents in promoting interculturality. Consequently, interculturality is integrated into university curricula, as it plays a critical role in transforming epistemic, political and social structures that perpetuate social inequalities (Gentile, 2023).

Furthermore, this approach supports the achievement of at least five of the Sustainable Development Goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda while also aligning with the strategy adopted by the Council of Ministers on 2 November 2021, which approved the National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma People 2021–2030 (Resolución A/RES/70/1 Transformar nuestro mundo: La Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible [Resolution A/RES/70/1 Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development], 2015; Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030, 2021). This strategy outlines the guidelines set forth in the European Strategic Framework 2020–2030 for the Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma population.

Consequently, it is necessary to establish an intervention plan through Teaching Innovation Projects that improve results and allow the creation of spaces for intercultural coexistence. From this perspective, during the next year different actions will be carried out in the university area that will consist of the exhibition of contents that make visible the culture of the Gypsy People, accompanied by contributions for the knowledge of their identity (history and culture, artistic expression, cinema, politics, gender and education), which will be taught throughout the course. The contents to be worked on are based on the results, using the same methodology and categories of analysis as those developed in this first phase of the research.

### Limitations of Research

The main limitations include the fact that research has been carried out through its exploratory and descriptive data, which needs to be further developed. We must reapply the instrument with wider and more diverse samples to validate it and see if these trends continue despite the interventions that are being made.

On the other hand, although the control group has fewer prejudices and stereotypes than the experimental group, it cannot be said to be the result of training on Gypsy culture contents, nor has it been possible to check whether there are other variables influencing the results.

The results are not possible to generalize because the students correspond to the grades of Early Childhood and Primary Education, and a small sample of students enrolled in the Degree of Social Education and Degree in Social Work for their links with the contents.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, J.M.A.-G., M.Á.C.-M., L.V.-L. and R.V.-R.; Methodology, J.M.A.-G., M.Á.C.-M., L.V.-L. and R.V.-R.; Formal analysis, J.M.A.-G. and L.V.-L.; Investigation, J.M.A.-G. and L.V.-L.; Data curation, J.M.A.-G. and L.V.-L.; Writing—original draft, J.M.A.-G., M.Á.C.-M., L.V.-L. and R.V.-R.; Writing—review & editing, J.M.A.-G., M.Á.C.-M., L.V.-L. and R.V.-R.; Visualization, J.M.A.-G., L.V.-L. and R.V.-R.; Supervision, J.M.A.-G., M.Á.C.-M. and L.V.-L.; Project administration, J.M.A.-G., M.Á.C.-M. and L.V.-L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of University of Valladolid (PI 23-3140 NO HCUV 11 May 2023).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The datasets used in this study are available from the research team coordinator (jesusmaria.aparicio@uva.es) upon reasonable request.

**Acknowledgments:** To the Recognized Research Group in Educational Psychology (GIR-179) of the University of Valladolid.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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