

Social Representations of Teaching and the Sub-Feminization of the Teaching Function: The Case of Undergraduate Students from Félix Houphouët Boigny University in Abidjan

YAO René Yao^{1*}, TOURE Kinanya Donatien²

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the problem of the under-feminization of the teaching function in Ivorian higher education. It aims to analyze the social representations of the teaching profession among women, especially among female students at the Félix Houphouët Boigny University. Collected using an evocation questionnaire, the data analyzed show that among female students, the teaching profession appears to be a complex, exhausting and stressful profession. The categorical analysis associated with the prototypical analysis highlights another dimension: the fulfilling aspect of the profession. However, the latter remains a secondary dimension insofar as only the elements of the central core are privileged and show consensus within the population questioned. These results indicate on the one hand, the existence of a structure of the elements and, on the other hand, a dichotomous content of the social representations of the profession.

Keywords: *Representations, Under-Feminization, Teaching, Students*

In the dynamic of the debates that continuously animate the theme of gender inequalities, the academic world is not left on the sidelines. Indeed, if parity is a goal pursued by States, it is not yet a fact. Very large disparities still exist between men and women, in terms of access to employment, education, etc. Higher education is particularly affected by this lack of parity. While the university has opened up considerably to girls with the emergence of new courses, we still see that the teaching profession still faces a gender imbalance. Few women are in higher education or at the head of institutions. The analysis performed by j. K. S. SINGH (2008) shows that only 1% of the 81 higher education institutions in English-speaking countries of sub-Saharan Africa are headed by women. They exercise 13% of the functions of dean and 18% of the functions of heads or directors of departments. In Rwanda, they represent 30% of primary school principals and 19% of secondary schools (USAID, 2014). At Makerere University in Uganda, although the share of female assistant teachers increased from 19% in 1996 to 33% in 2008, the percentage of female professors only increased from 4% to 12% (AM KAGODA, 2011).

¹Félix Houphouët Boigny University, Ivory Coast

²Félix Houphouët Boigny University, Ivory Coast

*Corresponding Author

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In Côte d'Ivoire, statistics show that, with the exception of preschool where women are strongly represented in the teaching staff (97.20% of women against 2.78% of men), they are less numerous compared to men in other levels of education. In 2017, the primary teaching staff was 30.9% women and 69.13% men. In high school, they represented 14.80% against 85.16% for men. At technical secondary level, they were estimated at 15% against 85.34% of men (Department of Strategies, Planning and Statistics, DSPS, 2018). In Ivorian higher education, the proportion of women in the number of teacher-researchers/ researchers is low and the situation does not seem to improve with the new recruitments, because over the period 2010-2017, the figures indicate that women represent only 17.9% of recruited staff (Higher education situational analysis report-2018, source: <https://www.yeclo.com/seignement-superieur-en-cote-divoire-un-rapport-overwhelming-on-a-catastrophic-situation/>, consulted on January 15, 2020 at 12:59 p.m.). At the Félix Houphouët Boigny University in Abidjan, 26% were women out of a total of 2,138 teacher-researchers and 91 researchers in 2017 (<http://Univ-Fhb.Edu.Ci/Index.Php/Ufhb/Quelques-Figures>, consulted on 07/25/2019 at 1:17 p.m.). This situation remains intriguing as it persists in a context where the participation of women in development is more necessary. Based on this observation, it is appropriate to question the explanatory factors for the under-feminization of the teaching profession at the higher level.

In the literature reviewed, F. PIGEYRE and M. SABATIER (2011) incriminate three types of factors. For these authors, the explanations for inequalities in the teaching profession are first of all historical. In this regard, they show that girls' lack of access to the same disciplines and institutions as boys in primary and secondary schools in the past is at the origin of perceived inequalities in universities and therefore in the teaching profession of today. Regarding the second type of factors, they focus on the process of socialization of individuals. In this regard, they consider that girls and boys are educated for different social roles (P. H. COOMBS, 1989; D. F. GBIKPI-BENISSAN, 2007). While men are assigned important functions, women are intended for so-called natural functions (mother, wife). Thus, reduced to the domination of men, they are marginalized, whether in access to education, employment, and political positions (E. DUFLO, 2006). In the third situation, F. PIGEYRE and M. SABATIER (op. Cit, p.2) index the practices and operations of universities as obstacles to the progression of women in education. According to their analysis, what explains the low representation of women in education is nothing more than the mode of administration of the universities themselves.

From the presentation of the results of work on the three groups of factors, we learn that historical, social and organizational determinants are taken into account in the explanation of gender inequalities in academia. Thus, we see that sociocognitive factors such as social representations have not been studied in order to understand the psychosocial view that women have of the teaching profession. However, the literature consulted indicates without ambiguity that social representations precede practices and guide our behavior (J. C. ABRIC, 2011). Consequently, they determine in every individual his position and also his way of interacting with his social environment. Based on this approach, we ask ourselves the following questions: what social representations do girls, in particular students, have of the teaching profession? Do these representations augur attractiveness to the profession? Social representations constitute the body of knowledge, beliefs and opinions shared by a group about a social object (C. GUIMELLI, 1994). The structural approach (J. C. ABRIC, 1976) that we adopt in this study takes into account two fundamental aspects in the study of social representation: the central core and the peripheral elements.

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The central core is the essential part of a social representation. It brings together the most consensual representational content and serves as a repository for recognizing the object and communicating about it. The elements that constitute it are those which determine the very essence of the representation studied. The central core is a generator of meaning, it helps to define the meaning of the other elements and of the whole representation. As for the elements of the peripheral system, they play a complementary role to that of the central nucleus. Characterized by inter-individual variation, they allow the representation to be personalized according to the individuals and their experiences. In the light of this approach and the questions raised, this study intends to study the social representations of the teaching profession among undergraduate students in Psychology at Félix Houphouët Boigny University. More specifically we are looking to: - examine the content and structure of social representations of the teaching profession among students; - list the realities with which they associate the elements of the content of their representations of the teaching profession. Below, we present all of the processes used to achieve these goals.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This part is structured around the presentation of the field of study, the population, the characteristics of the sample, the survey instrument and the data processing procedures 1.1. Land, population and sample This study is taking place at Félix Houphouët Boigny University. The choice of this university is explained by the fact that it is the largest of all with a greater number of faculties, teachers and students. The study is aimed at undergraduate students since the first years of study are very decisive in the continuation of the university course. The all-rounder technique used allowed 243 subjects to be interviewed as follows:

Table 1: Constitution of the sample

Levels	License 1			License 2			License 3			Total
Sectors	Psycho	Letters	Eco. Sc	Psycho	Lettres	Eco. Sc	Psycho	Letters	Eco. Sc	
Work-force	68	47	18	36	39	7	16	10	2	
Totals	133			82			28			243

Data analysis instrument and procedures

Instrument: the free evocation questionnaire

Our objective being to identify the elements of the content and the structure of social representations of the teaching profession, we use a free association method as a survey tool: the evocation questionnaire (P. VERGES, 1992). This technique involves asking respondents to write down the words or phrases that spontaneously come to mind when they hear the inductive phrase. It assumes that the most important ideas are stated first (rank of appearance). The order of appearance would reflect the accessibility of the terms, which would inform about the strength of the associations of each of them with the proposed category. In fact, the faster a term appears in the list, the more it would be strongly associated with the categorical label of the inducer word.

Method of analysis

The prototypical and categorical analysis method is that used for processing the data collected. It is a method of quantitative (frequency) and qualitative (rank of appearance) analysis that highlights the content and structure of the representation. It aims to study how

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free associations are organized by differentiating between central and peripheral elements (P. VERGES, op. Cit). We work directly from the evocations collected without prior content analysis. Then, we proceed to a thematic categorization of the elements of the content. Prototypical analysis involves crossing the rank and frequency of occurrence of items. Crossing these two indices gives what is called a 4-cell table:

Table II: The resulting areas of the prototypical analysis

	Low average rank	Medium high rank
High frequency	Box 1 central core area	Box 2 area of potential change
Low frequency	Box 3 area of potential change	Box 4 peripheral area

Box 1 groups together the most salient and significant elements and contains those which form the central core of the representation. Boxes 2 and 3 contain contradictory elements since either the frequency is important and the rank is also important, or the other way around. According to P. VERGES (1994), this is a potentially unbalancing area, a source of possible change in social representation. The elements of box 2 (high frequency) can be considered as elements which could potentially merge with those of box 1 (C. FLAMENT, 1994b). Box 4 has elements that are both not very present and not very important, this is the peripheral zone.

RESULTS

Social representations of the teaching profession

prototypical analysis the analyzes carried out on the data collected from the sample composed only of female students lead to the following table:

Table III: Prototypical analysis of representations of the teaching profession

	Average rank <1.6	Average rank ≥ 1.6
Frequency ≥ 49	Complex 49 1,510	None
	Exhausting 53 1,415	
	Stressan 53 1,566	
Fréquence < 49	Self-sacrifice 17 1,412	Admirable 10 1.8
	Knowledge 14 1,429	Formation 12 1,667
	Determination 43 1,558	Strikes 11 1,636
	Education 14 1,286	Noble 19 1,684
	Patience 18 1,444	Salary adjustment 10 1.6
	Research 23 1,522	
	Rigorous 22 1,182	

Based on the structural approach to social representations proposed by J. C. ABRIC, the elements: complex; exhausting and stressful, located in the first box (top left) are those that constitute the central core of the representation studied. They represent the opinions and beliefs which, according to the subjects surveyed, determine the teaching profession. These elements reveal three main axes of analysis. For the students surveyed, the teaching profession is complex, exhausting and stressful. These elements are those that reflect the consensus within the student population surveyed.

At the level of the periphery (box at the bottom right), there are several elements: admirable, training, strikes, noble and revaluation-salary. These elements make it possible to identify

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interindividual positions. Thus, we can say that for some students, the teaching profession is noble and admirable and contributes to the training of citizens. Others, on the other hand, believe that too many dysfunctions (strikes) characterize this profession and that it is not rewarding in terms of salary. In order to understand how all the evocations are distributed around prototypical notions, we deepen our analysis by categorical processing of the data.

Social representations of the teaching profession:

Categorical analysis In order to better understand the meanings of the core elements, we perform a complementary analysis below: the categorical analysis.

Table IV: Categorical analysis of social representations of the teaching profession

Catégories	Number Words	Occurrence	Frequent words	Elements of the category
Items not belonging to any category	10 (34.5%)	102 (21.3%)	55 (53.9%)	Attendance-Charisma-Discipline-Disrespectful students-Patience-Salary increase
Complex profession	5 (17.2%)	114 (23.8%)	105 (92.1%)	Rigorous-Strikes-Rooms / heat-Research-Disruption of classes
Exhausting profession	1 (3.4%)	53 (11.1%)	53 (100%)	Exhausting
Stressful job	1 (3.4%)	53 (11.1%)	53 (100%)	Stressful
Profession requiring determination	3 (10.3%)	57 (11.9%)	43 (75.4%)	Will-Work-Self-sacrifice
Fulfilling profession	9 (31.0%)	99 (20.7%)	69 (69.7%)	Interesting-Exciting-Noble-Admirable-Precious-Knowledge-Knowledge

Five main categories emerge from all the evocations: a complex job, exhausting, stressful, fulfilling and requiring determination. From all of these categories, two axes of interpretation emerge: on the one hand, we have the beliefs and opinions which convey a positive image of the teaching profession (fulfilling profession) and, on the other hand, those which convey a negative image of it (complex job, exhausting job, stressful job, job requiring determination).

The teaching profession seen as a fulfilling profession is reflected in terms such as: exciting, noble, precious, knowledge, knowledge and interesting. The students interviewed believe that the teaching profession is a valuable profession. It allows to acquire knowledge and also to transmit knowledge. However, this rewarding representation of the profession comes up against a set of negative beliefs and opinions which, unlike the rewarding dimension, are collectively shared by all students. The results of Table 2 clearly attest that the representation of female students about the teaching profession is built on elements with negative connotations: exhausting, stressful and complex profession. The complexity of the profession is reflected in the fact that the teaching profession requires rigor. There is also a representation that highlights strikes and difficult working conditions (disruption of classes). In addition to the "complex job" category, the other two categories consist of a single word (3.4%) mentioned 53 (11.1%) times. Frequent words represent 53 evocations out of the 53, or 100% of the 53 evocations. These categories are therefore constructed with few words having high frequencies. This shows that they are very important in the social representation studied.

DISCUSSION

This study has two specific objectives. On the one hand, it aims to define the structure of the social representations of the teaching profession, and on the other hand, to identify the realities with which students associate the content elements of these social representations. The results that emerge from this exploratory study clearly show that the social representations of the teaching profession admit of structuring. On the one hand, we have the central core made up of consensually shared elements and, on the other hand, the peripheral elements (elements that define the positions taken between individuals). Our first objective is thus achieved. Regarding the second, the results of the study show that social representations of the teaching profession are associated with several realities. The most important relate to the complexity of the job, how exhausting and stressful it is, and the determination it takes to do it. But, far from being seen only as a heavy job, the teaching profession also has a positive dimension: fulfilling. However, this dimension remains associated with the profession in relation to others since it appears in the peripheral sphere of representation.

The results of this study fit into a similar context as those of the study conducted by M. KEI (2009). We could even add that it is presented as a complement to it. Indeed, addressing the theme of professional commitment, the author shows how teachers already in office represent the reasons for their choice of the teaching profession. The analysis of the data shows that the choice of the teaching profession is motivated by needs (A. MASLOW, 1954; C. P. ALDERFER, 1972), the context and by the content of the work (F. HERBERG & al. 1959). In other words, the professional engagement of the teachers constituting the study sample is influenced by the content of the work, the context in which it takes place and the satisfaction of needs. Unlike the teachers already in office, the students interviewed put more emphasis on the characteristics of the work itself. It can therefore be argued that before becoming a teacher, it is the specific aspects of the work that determine the motivation for choosing this profession. The social cognitions attached to the teaching profession reveal among students a lack of attractiveness with regard to the profession. A feeling of discomfort also seems to emerge with regard to the profession. The findings of the study also agree with those of S. Y. AKAKPO-NUMADO and K. E. SENAYAH (2017). These authors, in an analysis adopting a dual approach, point out the factors explaining the low representation of women within the teaching staff of the University of Lomé. Three main conclusions are highlighted.

First, the difference in education received during family socialization which gives girls little chance of getting a university education and embracing the career of teacher-researcher. This perspective is also highlighted by F. PIGEYRE and M. SABATIER (2011). These studies show that during their process of socialization, girls and boys are not educated in the same prerogatives. The roles of future wives and especially mothers do not predispose girls to fight and develop a certain competitive spirit to reach the highest level in the professional world just like men. Family and household responsibilities fall on them and thus affect their working life. E. LATOUR and N. LEFEUVRE (2006) also show that, despite the fact that university women often seem to benefit from support systems (childcare, help with domestic tasks), they are not, however, relieved of the “mental load” linked to the organization and management of these tasks, and are not completely free to carry out the trips required by scientific activity (E. LATOUR and N. LEFEUVRE, op. cit. cited by F. PIGEYRE and M. SABATIER, 2011). These reasons may explain the fact that the students interviewed for our study perceive the teaching profession as complex, exhausting, stressful and above all

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requiring determination. Then, the school path differentiated by gender is called into question. The authors show at this level that girls fail and drop out of school more than boys. Thus, few girls manage to enroll in a doctoral path to later teach at university.

Finally, the negative perception that girls have of the teaching-research profession influences their professional orientation (S. Y. AKAKPO-NUMADO and K. E. SENAYAH, 2017). This last result further confirms our conclusions, thus showing, from different contexts, the fundamental role of the sociocognitive dimension in the understanding of the under-feminization of the teaching profession. Thus, this study opens up new perspectives for reflections centered on taking into account sociocognitive factors, in this case social representations, in the explanation of perceived inequalities within the teaching staff in universities.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study highlights the social representations of girls (students) about the teaching profession. The results show that the values (meanings) associated with the teaching profession are dichotomous (positive and negative) with a predominance of negative values. The theoretical framework on which the study is based shows that these representations define the way girls look at this profession. From this perspective, they can then be considered as the obstacles to access to the teaching profession for the students interviewed. Therefore, we can consider that a new set of factors (sociocognitive) must be taken into account in the relationship of women to different professions. However, it should be remembered that, given the technique sampling method adopted, the results of this study cannot be extrapolated. They can only be used as support for more elaborate studies.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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