Assessing Academic Levels of University Students in Ghana about Clothing and Textiles
A Case Study of Students of University of Ghana

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Abstract

Studying Textiles and Clothing at the lower level of education could help individuals make informed clothing choices at the higher level and beyond. Appropriate dressing implies selecting clothes that are right for one's body type and activities. Campus fashion seemed to suggest that many of the students did not have adequate knowledge about Textiles and Clothing. The study therefore investigated University of Ghana (Legon) resident students' academic levels in Clothing and Textiles. The proportionate random sampling technique was used to select 270 respondents from the five traditional halls of residence. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The hand coded data were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences. The results were presented using frequency and percentage distribution, histogram and pie chart. The ages of the respondents ranged between 18 and 50 years. About 42% were female and 50% male. Only 31% of the respondents had some knowledge in textiles and clothing. The remaining 69% had no knowledge about textiles and clothing. About 74% of those who had studied textiles and clothing did it up to Primary or Junior High School. Based on the study some practical recommendations have been made for the way forward.

Keywords: Fashion, clothing, textiles, knowledge, level, garment

1. Introduction

Fashion is one of the strongest forces in the world and it has motivated the way people dress for thousands of years. It dictates what people wear at home, for school, for business and for special functions. It is a general social phenomenon that affects and shapes man as a whole (Kefgen and Touchie-Specht, 1986). Fashion is a continuing process of change in styles of living and encompasses all facets of lifestyle. However, currently the word fashion readily brings to mind the trend or styles of clothing that are most popular at a particular time and place. According to Frings (1994) fashion can generally be defined as styles that are most popular at a particular time. It encompasses all facets of a lifestyle such as language, food, behaviour, architecture and clothing. Although fashion is not limited to clothing, clothing can be considered an active expression of fashion at a particular period. Shakespeare (1716) was cited by Rozencrans (1971) as having said that being out of fashion could be likened to being out of the world. Clothing is only a small part of the entire fashion concept but the most important one and it includes anything that is put on the body such as hair arrangement, painting, tattooing, scarring, garments and accessories (Kefgen and Touchie- Specht, 1986). Garments and some of their accessories are produced from textiles.

Textile is concerned with fabrics and the materials from which they are produced (Hollen and Saddler ,1971). Textiles and fashion are inseparable because they depend on each other. At school, work, or play; asleep or awake; sick or well; rich or poor; adult or child, everyone uses clothing. Opinions and attitudes that are formed early in life are often lasting, therefore it is important that children are taught the value of dressing appropriately at home and at school. Ryan (1966) quoted Dearborn (1918) to have stated that clothing reflect the values, attitudes and interest of the wearer. Research has established that values that direct other choices also will direct clothing choices. If one holds aesthetic values highest, then clothing will be selected for its attractiveness of line, beauty of the fabric or personal satisfaction of being well dressed. If economic values are the highest, clothing purchased may reveal the utility, quality and price as most important or the clothing selected may make a statement about financial status (high or low). Cross (1970) also observed that feeling right in one's clothes gives a sense of security and confidence especially, if one's clothes fit the group with which one is. Many female university students dress alike because they want to go with the 'flow' even if it causes them inconveniences. Clothing has been labeled the "silent language" as it communicates messages about the wearer to the observer. A well-dressed appearance makes a favourable impression on everyone. Improper dressing, on the other hand, may degrade the wearer or even provoke the observer and encourage sexual lust leading to rape, among others.

In Ghana, the arts of Textiles and Clothing have been taught under various course titles at various levels of the educational ladder over time. Since independence, there has been an evolution of course titles such as Housecraft, Domestic Science, Home Science , at the basic level of education ; Home Economics and Consumer Studies all coined to improve the contents of the school curricula. Seemingly, some of these course titles and their contents have not done enough to help students acquire skills in appropriate dressing. Before the

educational reforms in 1987, there were special centres known as Home Science Centres where female students were given special training in Cookery, Housewifery and Sewing. In contemporary times, at the basic level, clothing and textile related courses have been taught under subject titles such as Pre-vocational Skills (now Basic Design and Technology); visual Arts and Home Economics all aimed at equipping pupils and students with basic skills for life. However, the question is, has this aim been achieved? The academic level of a person's knowledge in Textiles and Clothing might affect his or her clothing behaviour. Knowledge about Textiles and Clothing might help one develop good taste and be able to make a more disciplined selection of clothes by applying principles or guidelines and methods learnt. Lack of knowledge or inadequate knowledge on the other hand could lead to wrong notions about what to wear, how to wear it and when to wear it.

2. Research Methodology
2.1 Research Design
There are two basic methods of research designs used in undertaking a study; these are quantitative which uses numbers in describing observation of materials or characteristics rather than words and the qualitative methods which uses words and pictures more than numbers (Best, 1981) but for the purpose of this study these two methods were used.
2.2 Population of the Study
Nkpa (1997) defines a population as a particular area or setting with common observable characteristics and a sample as a smaller group selected from a larger group or population. Out of the total population of resident students a sample size of 300 was used to undertake the study.
The proportionate random sampling technique was used to select the respondents from the five halls of residence. This technique made it possible to select a representative number of respondents for the study.
2.3 Data Collection Technique
According to Best (1981) a questionnaire uses a series of written questions on a particular topic about which a respondent's opinion is sought and it could be open or close ended. In this study both open and closed-ended questions were used to collect data.
Since all the respondents were literate, the questionnaire was self-administered by respondents to save time and make analysis easier.
Unobtrusive observation was done to support information gathered. Photographs of various fashion styles were also taken of some students on campus to illustrate information.
Three hundred questionnaires were administered between October and November 2006. Two hundred and seventy-one (271) questionnaires were retrieved. One questionnaire was rejected because the responses in it were not applicable to the study.

3. Findings and Discussion
Figure 1 shows that the respondents were made up of 58% (157) males and 42% (113) females. Even though the sample was proportionately selected based on gender population of the five halls of residence, the study revealed that university of Ghana campus fashion was dominated by females. Fashion change among females was more rapid on campus than that of their male counterparts and this result is compatible with a report by Law-et-al (2004) that women's fashion change is so rapid that a 20 or 30 year old dress worn in public would make the wearer an object of universal curiosity and ridicule. On the other hand a male attire of equal age can easily be worn in public without exciting comment.

Table 1 depicts the age distribution of the respondents which was skewed to the age range of 18-22 years. There were 149 respondents in that age range making 56.3% of the sample. This was because the age range expected of majority of University students was in that range. This might have therefore made the problem quite pronounced at the University of Ghana. The study of Gawne and Oerke (1968) as well as Tai and Tam (2005) indicated that young consumers attached greater importance to clothing as a means of gaining acceptance and approval than did mature persons, hence they had the highest propensity to adopt fashion that was inappropriate.

Figure 2 indicates the religious affiliation of the respondents. Female students on campus who were of the Moslem faith could readily be identified by their way of dressing which concealed their entire body parts. A female Moslem's attire usually comprised a gown, a lose long sleeved top with a long skirt or pair of loose trousers and a veil or shawl. These clothes covered all body parts except the face, hands and feet. As far as respondents' knowledge about Textiles and Clothing was concerned, figure 3 revealed that about 31% (84) of the respondents had knowledge about Textiles and Clothing which meant that they had some knowledge about good grooming, colour choice, accessories and clothing choice among others. This further suggested that majority about 69% (183) of the students had not learnt much about clothing choice, colour and good grooming among others, and could easily become confused and make fashion errors.

The results in Table 2 shows that of the 84 respondents who had knowledge about Textiles and

Clothing, majority (74%) had it at the Primary or JSS level, While 8.7% each had it at the SSS level, 6.5% had it at the post-secondary level. These levels of education however might not have well equipped respondents with knowledge on choice of clothing so as to meet the demands of societal values. Hence some of them tended to become fashion followers as they responded to peer pressure demands. Only 4 students each offered Textiles and Clothing at the tertiary level or had private tuition. These findings seem to suggest that even the 31% who ever studied Textiles and Clothing had very limited knowledge. There is therefore the need to take the teaching and learning of Textiles and Clothing at all levels of education seriously.

As indicated in figure 4, 85% of the respondents wore the same clothes at home and on campus. They claimed they could not afford to have two sets of clothes. However about 8% indicated that they wished to preserve campus clothes therefore did not wear them at home. They also were of the view that campus clothes were not suitable enough to be worn at home. This however explained the fact that some of them were aware of the provocative nature of campus fashion and therefore could not wear them at home. Now what about those who wore the same clothes on campus and at home? Was there nothing provocative about such clothes and if there was, what were the reactions of parents and guardians to such clothes? This would be worth researching into.

Casual observation of the trend revealed that many students did not consider their body sizes (figure types) in their choice of clothing. Once a style was in fashion students chose to wear it whether it was becoming on them or not. This suggests that a good number of them had wrong mental pictures of who they were due to their lack of knowledge about clothing selection. Kefgen-et-al (1986) are of the view that one's clothing choice reflects one's self-concept. The self-concept is the general notion that one has of oneself. This self-image may be a very incorrect assessment of either the physical or psychological self or both. It is not uncommon to find fat or slim female students in unbecoming clothes such as tight trousers and tops that emphasize weak areas of their figures just to be in fashion. This is because they may not perceive themselves as fat or slim. A true assessment of their self image can help them select clothing that reflect the concept of whom they really are. Seemingly, female fashion on Legon campus was pretty conformed, with almost every student trying to go with the flow. Majority wore tight jeans and skimpy tops that exposed vital body parts such as breasts, midriff and thighs. Krall (2004) described seeing the same styles adorning students on campus as boring and therefore called for variety and individuality in campus fashion trend.

4. Summary of Major Findings

The aim of the study was to investigate University of Ghana students knowledge levels in Textile and Clothing, types of clothes students wore on campus. The proportionate random sampling technique was used to select three hundred resident students from Akuafo, Legon, Mensah–Sarbah, Volta and Commonwealth halls of the University of Ghana. A questionnaire with both open and close-ended questions was used in collecting the data. Two hundred and seventy questionnaires were retrieved and analyzed. Frequency and percentage distribution, pie and bar charts were used to present and discuss the data. The respondents comprised 157 male and 113 female students. They were aged between 18 and 50 with majority within 18 to 22. Fashion change was more rapid and pronounced among female students than male. Religious affiliation of respondents fell under Christianity (87%), Moslem (11%) and agnostic (2%). About 69% of the respondents never offered a course in Textiles and clothing.

4.1 Conclusions

The respondents had limited knowledge about textiles and clothing. Seemingly, they did not know about selection of clothing to suit their figure types and occasion. There was therefore the need to further research into the factors that influenced clothing behaviour among students.

Acknowledgement

4.2 Recommendations

- Teaching of Home Science and for that matter Textiles and Clothing be reintroduced and made compulsory at the basic level to equip children with knowledge and skills that will help them make right clothing choices in life.
- Decent dressing be made mandatory by hall tutors; resident students who fail to comply could be made to lose their residential status.
- Freshmen, during orientation be sensitized on the need to dress decently and be made aware of

sanctions that go with indecent dressing.
- Lecturers to remind students to dress appropriately for lectures.
- Meeting between Home Science Department and executive members of National tailors and dressmaking Association and other stakeholders to encourage them to advice their clients to design and dress appropriately to suit their figure types.
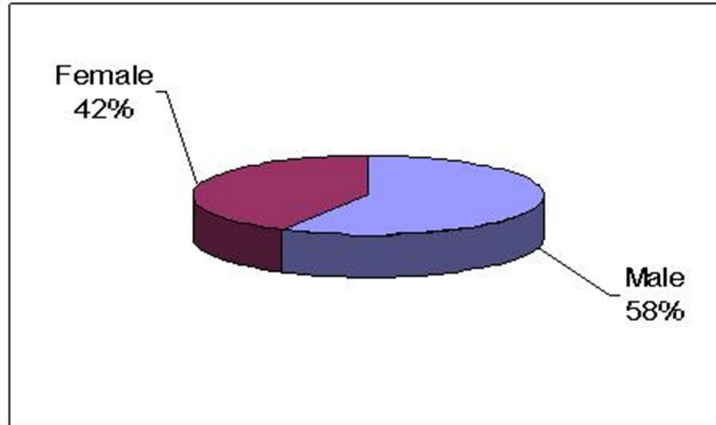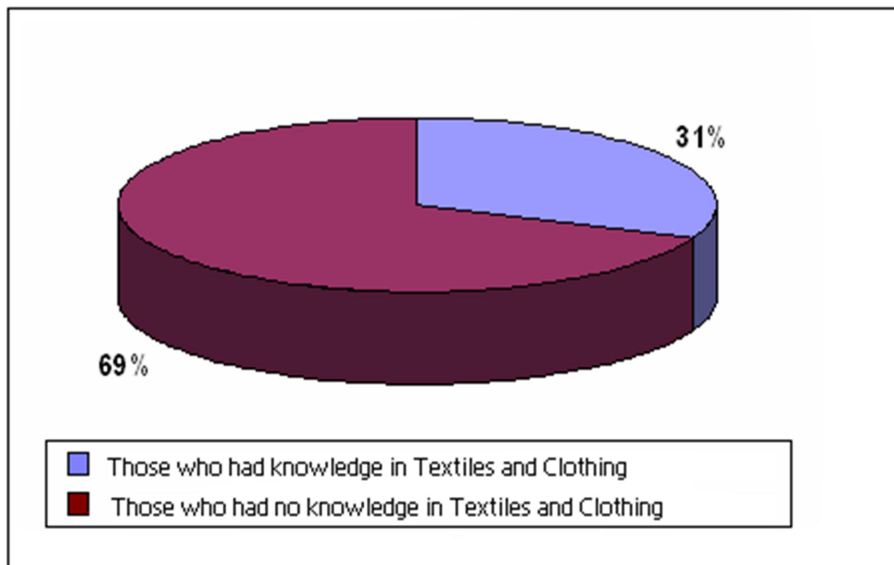

Figure 1: Gender of Respondents
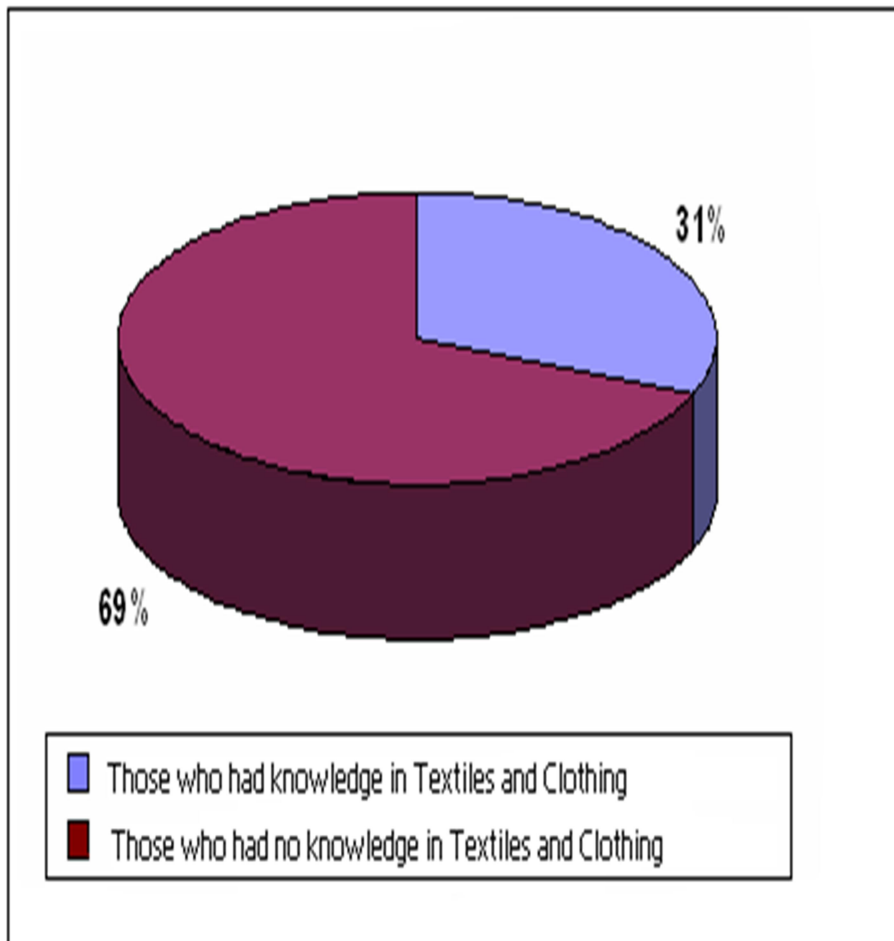
Tab 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age in years	Number	%
18-22	149	55.3
23-27	58	21.6
28-32	19	7.1
33-37	6	2.5
38-42	3	1.3
43-47	2	0.8
48-50	1	0.4
Total	238	100.0
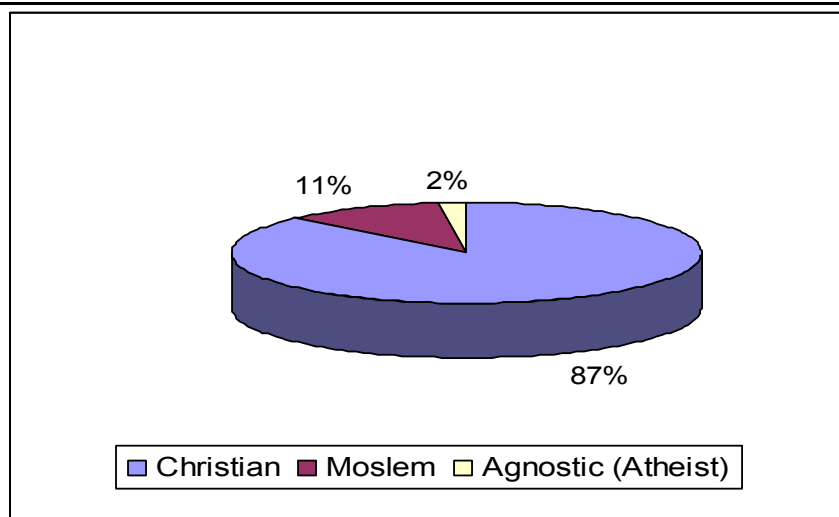
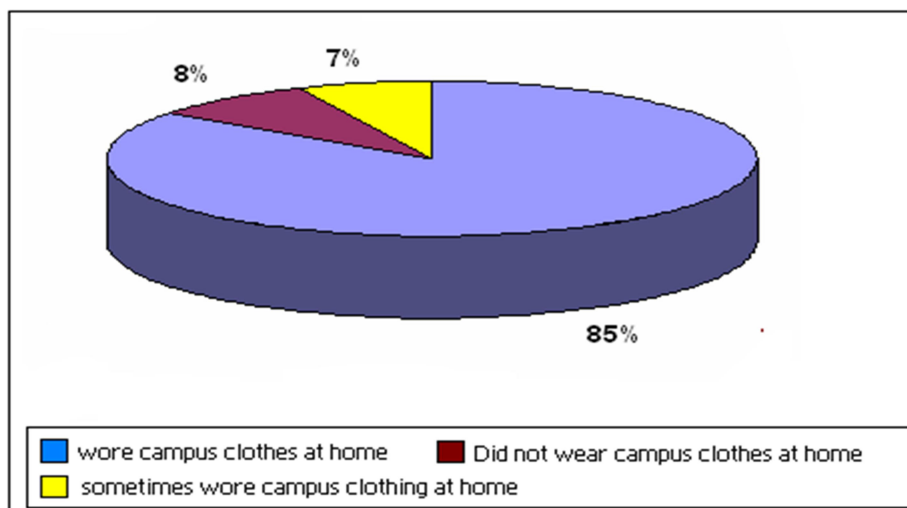**Figure 2: Respondents' Religious Affiliations**

Figure 3: Respondents' Knowledge about Clothing and Textiles

Tab 2: Respondents' Academic Level of Textiles and Clothing

Level	Number	%
Primary/JSS	64	73.9
SSS	8	8.7
Post secondary	6	6.5
Tertiary	4	4.3
Private tuition	4	4.3
Total	84	100.0

Figure 4: Respondents' Clothing Pattern at Home and on Campus

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