

## **Attitudes of Male Students' towards Home Economics in Ghana: A Case Study of Colleges of Education in the Eastern/ Greater Accra (EGA) Zone**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** The research seeks to examine male students' attitude toward Home Economics Education in the college by covering their perception about external influence on Home Economics as a course of study.

**Materials and methods:** Quantitative survey approach was employed in the study and questionnaire was used to collect data for the research. The study randomly selected 346 male students from 7 colleges purposefully in one of the college zones. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics was use to analyses the data collected.

**Results:** The result elicited that the male students disagree that external influence such as parent does not influence their attitude towards the study of Home Economics. The study further disputes the assertion that male students have negative perception on the study of Home Economics. The result again shows that, there is a positive moderate relationship between external factors and male students' perception on Home Economics.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that one of the factors militating against male students from pursuing home economics is gender biased perspectives developed through socio-cultural conditioning that Home Economics education is for females only.

**Keywords:** Male students; attitude; Home economics

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Date of Submission: 21-05-2021

Date of acceptance: 06-06-2021

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### **I. Introduction**

Home Economics is a major subject of study at all levels in Ghana. Pupils are introduced to aspects of Home Economics at the primary level and then at the junior high school level as a compulsory subject called Basic Design and Technology, which is a combination of Home Economics, Visual Arts And Pre-Technical Skills. At the senior secondary school level, Home Economics is an elective course comprised of three subjects: food and nutrition, clothing and textiles and management in living. Students of Home Economics have the option of specializing in either food and nutrition or clothing and textiles. The Education Act 2008, defines the inclusion of Home Economics in the school curriculum and other vocational subjects as the primary learning areas that can offer employment to those who offer it.

When it comes to Home Economics as an academic course of study, gender is visible and plays a determinative role in pupils' participation. This is because of the gender biased perspectives and association attached to the course. Gender has been identified as a critical yet overlooked issue in Home Economics education in Ghana.<sup>1</sup> This is evident in the current set up for study of Home Economics at the secondary school level. The subject is not taught in any of the 24 boys' only secondary schools in Ghana. This policy deprives a large number of male students from being exposed to home economics which they could otherwise have been interested in.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in female single-sex schools, technical courses are not offered. These variations are subtle ways of reinforcing gender-stereotyped roles, which are already deeply rooted in Ghanaian culture.<sup>1</sup>

In Ghana, Home Economics education is dominated by females, with less than 5% male enrolment.<sup>2</sup> The female-biased nature of home economics education in Ghana can be traced to how the programme was introduced into the formal education system.<sup>1</sup> They further state that "from the very beginning, the content, structure and scope of home economics in Ghana were limited to traditional feminine roles, and boys were discouraged from performing these perceived female roles both in school and at home. And as such, girls were offered the home economics course and boys took other courses, such as the sciences and the technical courses and the pattern has persisted to this day".<sup>1</sup>

Home Economics, in its general scope is a study of laws, conditions, principles and ideas which are concerned with man's immediate physical environment and his nature as a social being, and the relationship between the two factors (The 4th Lake Placid Conference, 1902). Home economics education as a course of

study, is essential for both self-development as well as the wellbeing of society. Five specialty areas made up the core of Home Economics for over six decades of the twentieth century but more distinct specializations evolved between 1970 and 2000.<sup>3</sup> These specializations include institutional management and food science, child development and family relations, textile science and merchandising of consumer goods, interior design with emphasis on enhancing human wellbeing and consumer economics and family resource management.<sup>3</sup>

Home Economics is defined as “the science of study that focuses on the inter-relationships between resources, diet, health, the home, the individual and family needs, where the central concern is achieving an optimal quality of life for individuals and their families”.<sup>4</sup> The aim of Home Economics education, as the definition suggests, is to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead effective lives in different roles and contexts in society; specifically to maintain and promote healthy behaviors, become productive citizens and adapt in a fast changing world.<sup>4</sup> Home Economics as a course of study also focuses on creating opportunities for students and practitioners on the job market and affords students many opportunities to become self-employed.<sup>5</sup>

Gender has been an integral part of the development of home economics throughout its 120-year history.<sup>1</sup> Gender simply identifies the sexes of humans; male and female. Denoted gender roles, however is a social construct handed down from generation to generation. It has been ingrained in cultures and societies for as long as man could remember. It is this conditioned construct or mindset that distinguishes role behavior and maps out the mental and emotional characteristics between the male and female gender. The issue of gender, in this context cannot be isolated and addressed because it runs through structures and cultures at both the individual and the societal level, and the concept of gender has different meanings for different people.<sup>6</sup> These factors make it very difficult to challenge the normative, dichotomized perspectives on gender that has existed in society for so long.<sup>7</sup>

Gender constructs usually leads to stereotyping. A stereotypical behavior expresses something that has become inevitable, static and the accepted norm. Gender stereotype as a “situation where differential performance or interests and pursuits of boys and girls are experienced due to culture bias on the role expected of each gender”.<sup>8</sup> These differential roles for boys and girls poses a very serious problem to Home Economics as a course of study for males because a lot of people see it as a course meant for females.<sup>8</sup> However, Home Economics, though a female-defined discipline, was never intended to be for women only.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, times have changed and the stereotypical attitudes and perspectives towards gender roles is changing, so must the field of Home Economics if it will thrive as an academic field of study.

In the Ghanaian context, gender inequality is seen as fuelled by cultural attitudes and values present in the society. Ghanaian society is an epitome of most African communities' where there are prescriptions for appropriate male and female roles.<sup>10</sup> the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity in Ghanaian society is based on beliefs in fundamental biological distinctions between male and female human natures and corresponding behavioural prescriptions typically expressed in societal norms and values.<sup>11</sup> As a result, household tasks are often gender stereotyped, which encourages the disparities between gender enrolments in different subjects.<sup>11</sup> these differentiated socialization paths for boys and girls affects their gender role perceptions in adulthood and influence their academic and career choices later in life.<sup>12</sup>

To understand the essence of home economics requires a shift in mind-set.<sup>9</sup> this shift in perspectives, according her, will bring about a holistic reality and cause the study of home economics to be seen beyond gender lines but as a more complex social, intellectual and scientific pursuit. There is the need to establish a complementary male and female mind-set that allows the viewing of the two simultaneously existing spheres as less defined by biological sex, permitting individuals to shift from one world to another in a more flexible manner.<sup>9</sup> This shift in thinking will help society appreciate home economics for its potential to contribute to society and reduce the gender-role stereotyping of necessary everyday tasks.

This paper seeks to examine male students' attitudes towards Home Economics education in Colleges of Education in Ghana by addressing the following variables:

1. What is students' perception about external influence (parent, educators and society) on male students' attitude toward home economics education?
2. What are students perceptions of Home Economics as a course of study for male students
3. Is there a relationship between external influence and students' attitude towards Home Economics education?

## **II. Materials And Methods**

This study uses the quantitative survey approach. A survey questionnaire was designed for collecting data. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part collected data on the students' demography, the second part consisted of 7 items on the influence of parents on male students' attitude toward Home Economics education and the third part was on students' perception on Home Economics as a course of study for male students. All questions were close ended with multiple choice responses measured on the Likert scale.

**Subjects & selection method:** The sample population for the study were students in Colleges of Education in the Eastern/ Greater Accra (EGA) zone who offer Home Economics as part of their programmes. The EGA zone is made up of seven (7) colleges comprising Accra College of Education, Kibi College of Education, Akropong Presbyterian College, Ada College of Education, Aburi Presbyterian College, Somanya College of Education, Oda Methodist College, Abetifi Presbyterian College and SDA College of education. Out of these seven colleges, three were purposefully sampled: Kibi, Ada, and Presby Colleges of Education offer Home Economics. Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, schools were on break so data was collected online using Google Docs.

**Sample size:** 346 male students were randomly sampled from the three colleges responded to the questionnaire. A summary of the respondents is as follows; Kibi College of Education. 143(41.3%), Ada College of Education 50(14.5%), Presby College of Education 153(44.2%).

### Statistical analysis

The data was analysed using SPSS 25 version. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviation) was used to analyse the external influence on male students' attitude and perception on home economics education. inferential statistics (Correlation) was used to analyse the relationship between parental influence and students' perception.

## III. Results

### *Level of external influence on male students' attitude towards Home Economics education*

The study sought to establish if there is parental influence on students' attitude towards the study of Home Economics. The results is displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistic on external influence on students' attitude

External Influence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Social belief frown on males choosing Home Economics as an academic course	346	2.63	1.419
2. My parents do not have adequate knowledge on career options offered by Home Economics	346	1.43	.495
3. The society has the misconception that Home Economics is for girls	346	2.67	1.539
4. I fear ridicule from peers and society when I choose Home Economics	346	2.79	1.567
5. I am not encouraged to pursue Home Economics by society	346	3.03	1.519
6. My parents have influence on my choice of course in the college	346	2.31	1.549
7. I am discouraged by comments of some teachers to pursue Home Economics	346	2.44	1.485
Overall mean		2.4946	

From Table 1, the students strongly disagree ( $M=1.43$ ,  $SD=0.495$ ) that parents do not know career options offered by Home Economics. The result also show that the student disagree ( $M=2.67$ ,  $SD=1.53$ ) that the society has misconceptions that Home Economics is for girls. The students further disagree that their parents have influence in their choice of course in the college and also disagree that their teachers comments discourage them ( $M=2.31$ ,  $SD=1.549$ ) and ( $M=2.44$ ,  $SD=1.485$ ) respectively. However, the students were undecided about society's support in pursuance of Home Economics ( $M=3.03$ ,  $SD=1.519$ ).

### *Students' perceptions of Home Economics as a course of study for male students*

To understand students' perception on Home Economics education, a descriptive statistic was used to analyze the responses. The result is displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Descriptive statistic on students' perception on Home Economics education

Students perception	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Home Economics is a course for females only	346	2.43	1.669
2. Home Economics is a course for males only	344	1.26	.771
3. Home Economics is a course for both males and females	344	4.10	1.381
4 I do not have interest in Studying Home Economics	346	2.80	1.388
5. Home Economics is an easy course for boys	346	1.95	1.167
6. There is no career path for males who study Home Economics	331	1.88	1.183

7. Home Economics will make me self employed	346	4.47	.908
8. Home Economics is for people who want to learn cooking	346	2.50	1.641
9. I prefer other elective courses to Home Economics	346	3.57	1.363
Overall mean		2.7106	

From Table 2, the students strongly agree that Home Economics is for both male and female (M=4,10 SD=1.381). The students also agree that Home Economics will make them self-employed (M=4.47, SD=0.908). The students disagree that home economics is for people who want to learn cooking (M=2.50, SD=1.641). The respondents also disagree that there is no career path for males who study home economics (M= 1.88, SD= 1.183)

**Relationship between parents influence and students attitude towards Home Economics education**

To establish the relationship between parents influence on students attitude towards Home Economics, a correlation test was conducted and the results displayed in Table 6.

**Table 3:** Correlation between parental influence and students' perception

		External influence	Student perception
External influence	Pearson Correlation	1	.472**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	346	329
Student perception	Pearson Correlation	.472**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	329	329

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result from Table 3 indicate that the correlation between the external factors and students perception on Home Economics studies is (r=.472, p<0.01). Using R<sup>2</sup> =0.228 suggest that there is 22% variability in external factors and students perception.

**IV. Discussion**

Analyzing the Level of external influence on male students' attitude towards Home Economics education, the overall mean of 2.4946 suggest the students were of the opinion that there is society's support in pursuance of Home Economics. This is confirmed in a statement that the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity in Ghanaian society is founded on a belief in fundamental biological distinctions between male and female human natures and corresponding behavioural prescriptions expressed in societal norms and values.<sup>11</sup> This kind of conditioning informs the thinking patterns of gender roles and tasks which eventually influences what programs will be pursued in school and what careers can be had depending on one's gender. These factors are in no doubt fueled by social and individual beliefs associated with gender constructs which usually leads to stereotyping and false perceptions and values which has become a serious barrier to Home Economics education.<sup>8</sup>

On the perception of students on home economic as a male chosen course, the students agree that home economics is for both male and female. The results contrast an assertion that since its introduction into the Ghanaian educational system, it has been limited to traditional feminine roles, and boys were discouraged from performing these perceived female roles".<sup>1</sup> The responses further show that a shift in mind-set is occurring as envisioned.<sup>9</sup> However, the results contradicts reports that suggest that, male learners are significantly more likely to choose science, agriculture, business, or technical studies.<sup>13</sup> There are various theories as to why males lose interest in Home Economics. The study again, disputes a finding that male learners perceive Home Economics as a course that makes a person a servant and not a master.<sup>14</sup>

On the relationship between parents influence and students attitude towards home economics education, results The result from Table 3 indicate a moderate positive relationship between the external factors and students perception on Home Economics studies (r=.472, p<0.01). Using R<sup>2</sup> =0.228 suggest that there is 22% variability in external factors and students perception.

**V. Conclusions**

Based on the results and findings of the study, it can be concluded that the major factors that inhibit male students from pursuing Home Economics at the tertiary level are:

- gender biased perspectives developed through socio-cultural conditioning that Home Economics education is for females only

- fear of social derision if male students should choose to pursue the Home Economics course
- Lack of interest on the part of male students is mostly fuelled by social beliefs, concerns of career options and the perceived lack thereof;
- lack of encouragement from authority figures such as parents, teachers and educationists enforced by the current educational policies concerning Home Economics education
- lack of thorough understanding on the part of students on what exactly Home Economics education entails as a field of study and its practical applications and
- the present content and structure of the course which is geared towards prescribed feminine roles

It can also be concluded from the results that, there is a shift in perceptions from the old gender biased paradigm of thinking (with respect to the study of Home Economics) to a more gender balanced point of view caused by exposure to higher learning. These findings prove that even with the advances made in the pursuit of gender balance in all fields of human endeavor, the issue of gender-biased attitudes and stereotyping persists when it comes to the field of Home Economics and it remains a huge barrier in the enrollment of male students. The seeming lack of encouragement of males to pursue Home Economics education is both a social and institutional issue; stakeholders are simply influenced by gender biased perceptions and pass it along. There is a need for a concerted effort to change gender related perceptions about Home Economics education in Ghana. Based on the results and findings, we recommend that:

- The Ghana Education Service must review the current approach, policies, content and structure of Home Economics education in Ghana and update these policies towards a more gender balanced approach.
- There is a need for practicing Home Economists in Ghana to embark on a drive to eradicate gender biased perspectives and attitudes associated with the course and alleviating the fear of social derision faced by male students who choose to pursue the discipline.
- There is a need to start educating students early i.e. at the JHS level about the broad scope of Home Economics and its career options so that they are well equipped to take the right decisions later about their careers and
- Stakeholders i.e. parents, teachers and educationists must be encouraged to promote the course to their male wards by broadening their understanding of what exactly Home Economics education entails as a field of study and its practical applications and benefits in everyday life.

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Ruth Sitsofe Kwakudua, et. al. "Attitudes of Male Students' towards Home Economics in Ghana: A Case Study of Colleges of Education in the Eastern/ Greater Accra (EGA) Zone." *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, 11(3), (2021): pp. 15-19.