

Considerable Factors Influencing the Selection of Children's Wear Made in African Print Fabrics

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Abstract

African print is gaining much popularity worldwide. Its usage for children's wear is fast growing. Therefore, there was a need to find out what consumers considered when choosing African print fabrics for children's wear. The research utilized the qualitative method as the main method of gathering data where a descriptive survey design was employed to solicit data from forty (40) respondents. In-depth interviews were done with school children between the ages of 5-10 years, and one of each child's parents. The study adopted interviews and observation with children's emotions captured by the use of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT).

Results from interviews and observations, although not generalizable indicated that different types of African print possess different qualities. Colour, price, motif size, and pattern layout influenced the selection of African print for children's wear. The implication of this finding is that textile designers should make durable, versatile fabrics that are colourful but incorporate classic shapes and patterns with fun details.

Keywords: African print fabrics, children's wear, clothing, consumers, considerable factors, selection

1. Introduction

In recent times, children's wear has become one of the fast-growing sectors in the garment industry. Children's wear is clothing for children not yet grown to full height (Horyn, 2012). As such, they are often more casual than adult clothing, fit for play and rest. They are expected to be easy to move in, comfortable for the skin, of higher fabric quality, cool to wear, have less hairiness in fabric, and are colourful to watch (Roy, 2012). By the nature of their age and activities, children need a lot of clothing. Therefore, they are seen as an increasingly important targeted group for fashion clothing. Schor (2004) referred to them as being "Born to Buy" because they are constantly changing in size and their clothes wear out quickly and need regular replacements.

One of the fabrics gaining more recognition and traction across Africa for children's wear is African prints (Mbumbwa & Chigada, 2018). The citizenry in Africa takes great pride in the usage of the novel African print to express beliefs, cultural values, and ethnic identity. In Kitenge's (2021) perspective, African print fabrics have unique patterns and vibrant colours. Thus, contributing to the building up of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-acceptance. Various research so far concentrates on the use of African prints by adults (Adeloye, 2022; Chichi, et al. 2016; Ugalo, 2015) and its usage for adult clothing (Amankwah & Howard, 2013; Dogoe, 2013:). However, there are few studies present on children's clothing made with African print fabrics and how consumers perceive them, therefore, this study seeks to solicit consumers' views on the types of African prints available on the Ghanaian market and the factors that influence their choice of children's wear made in African print fabrics.

2. Literature Review

2.1 African Print

African print fabrics, also known as Dutch wax print, Ankara, or Kitenge is a 100% cotton cloth. It is not of African origin but has come to be accepted and produced in Africa as part of African Textiles with the incorporation of traditional symbols (Ugalo, 2015). In commercial parlance, African print is a general term employed by European

textile firms in Africa to identify fabrics that are machine-printed using wax resins and dyes to achieve a batik effect on both sides of the cloth. It is also a term for those imitating or achieving a resemblance of the wax-type effects (Akinwumi, 2008). These fabrics have significant communicative values, indicating status or wealth and conveying messages as a means of non-verbal expressions on official occasions, political avenues, and for social purposes (Chichi et al., 2016; Ugalo, 2015). Hence, most African prints are very colourful.

Cotton plays a major role in the clothing of children. Approximately 86% of children wear are of cotton because they have a soft and natural feel that offers comfort, safety, and convenience (Roy, 2012). Researchers have identified and analysed different types of African prints. Ugalo, (2015) grouped them into two main categories, that is, Real wax and Imi (fancy) wax. Steiner (2002) earlier described these two main types as wax prints (wax batiks) and non-wax prints (fancy or roller prints). Abraham (2013) referred to them specifically as classical and contemporary prints. Findings by Ugalo (2015) indicate that Real wax was the first to be introduced to Africa and is the machine version of the Indonesian batik cloth. Wax resins and dyes are applied to the grey cloth to achieve a batik effect on both sides of the printed fabric. It has the same colour intensity on both sides characterized by the 'crackle effect' mechanically applied through the manufacturing process. This implies that no two pieces of fabric are alike and as such, it increases the market value of African print fabrics. This also makes them expensive. Real wax is produced in Ghana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, China, and Holland with China dominating the market by producing 90% of all real wax (Adeloye, 2022).

The imi wax, also referred to as fancy, Java print, roller print, 'le fancy or le légos' is printed on only one side of the fabric in a continuous process through rotary screen-printing techniques Ugalo, (2015). It does not require the use of wax resin and the designs may not carry any proverbial concepts of Africanism like the initial wax print designs. Nigeria was the largest producer of Imi wax but China now dominates. These fabrics are produced for mass consumption and are cheaper than real wax print. Fancy fabrics are more intense and richer in colours than real wax prints (Ugala, 2015).

African print fabrics are identified by their brands and manufacturers' names such as Hollandais, Woodin, Printex, Superwax, GTP, Vlisco, Uniwax, Abada, and Nichemwax among others. The type of African print fabric has a significant impact on its quality in terms of the percentage of cotton in the composition of the fabric (Adeloye, 2022). Similarly, the type and brand of the prints also determine the colour intensity and price of the African print fabric. Different manufacturers are known for the quality of prints they produce by the citizenry. This is also influenced by the price of the finished fabric and thus children wear made from them.

2.2 Factors to Consider When Selecting Children's Wear

Children like clothes and buy clothes (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003). Since young people are equally involved in the purchasing of consumable goods, they play a major role in buying decisions (Pandya, 2016). Cardoso et al. (2012) noticed that young people have different attitudes, values, and purchase behaviour when it comes to clothing. They look for information in their social relationship with their friends and family.

According to Solomon (2004), the major decision criteria influencing the choice of children's wear are colour, style, fabric, price, size, and seam. In the same vein, Koksai (2007), noted that price, quality, convenience, payment conditions, and size of clothing as factors that affect consumers' decisions towards shopping for children's clothing. Furthermore, factors that influence consumer behaviours such as cultural, social, personal, and psychological highly influence acceptability (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Solomon, 2004). On the other hand, Chichi et al, (2016) realised that factors such as brand and quality, colour scheme, pattern size and layout, symbolism and cultural significance, and adaptability of the African print design are the main driving forces that influence consumers to choose a particular print for a specific need. These writers express a common view that certain factors influence the selection of clothing, especially among children.

For many consumers, price is the most important factor that determines where and what to buy. A study conducted in the United States in 2012 by NPD Group reported that for 85% of consumers, the price needs to be right before they decide where to shop and what to buy. In another research on an internet retailing blog using data from a global retail marketplace, Rakuten, price, the retailer's reliability, and choice were reported to be the most important factors that consumers considered before buying.

An earlier study by Garber & Hyatt, (2003) identified colour as the most important factor when selecting children's clothing. Children demonstrate a distinct emotional association with colours. McNeal et al, (2003) also found colours preferred by children to include red, yellow, and orange usually in the packaging of products since they are the most

eye-catching. Girls, in particular, have a preference for brighter colours and a dislike for darker colours. Shi (2013) adds that color influences mood or attitude towards a product and creates a certain image of a product. It is usually used as a direct or indirect estimate of quality.

Research by Anitha (2020) included children's opinions in the selection of their wear. Children use influencing tactics such as bargaining, persuasion, emotional and request strategies to influence the purchasing decisions of their parents (Ellis and Maikoo, 2019). The intention to investigate consumers' considerable factors influencing the selection of children's clothes made from African print fabrics is suggested to be based on colour, price/cost, pattern size, and style.

3. Methods

This study employed the qualitative research approach to explore parents' and children's views on the factors consumers consider in selecting African prints for children's wear at Winneba. In-depth interviews, observation, and Thematic Apperception Test (T.A.T.) were the main instruments used to gather data from the study participants. The study participants were purposively selected. Thematic Apperception Test (T.A.T.) also known as a picture interpretation technique is a projective psychological test that helps children respond to questions based on what they see in the form of photographs (Cherry, 2022). This helped in capturing both verbal and non-verbal clues, emotions, and behaviours of twenty (20) school children between the ages of 5 to 10 years (Gordon et al, 2017) as Group One (1). Group Two (2) was made up of either parent of each child interviewed, making up of twenty (20) parents. A total of 40 participated in the study at Winneba, Ghana.

Children were interviewed and observed with the aid of photographs of garments in African prints. The photographs aimed to give a clearer meaning to what African prints were about and ascertain which factors motivated them in selecting the African print garments. It was expedient to observe the enthusiasm with which children were willing to participate, the emotional clues they exhibited in the selection of the type of African print garment preferred, and the motivating factors. The research was conducted in basic schools where children often wore African prints on vacation days and where ethical considerations could easily adhere.

Parents were purposively interviewed to ascertain the type of African prints they use for their children's wear, the most preferred choice, reasons for choice, and the factors considered. Appointments were booked with parents when they dropped their wards in schools to be conveniently interviewed. Only parents whose children were interviewed were part of this study.

4. Results

The findings of this study provide an in-depth understanding of considerable factors influencing the selection of children's wear made in African print fabrics. In this section, the results of the data analysis are provided. The objectives were to examine consumers' views on the types of African prints available on the Ghanaian market and to ascertain factors that influence the choice of children's wear made in African print fabrics. Chichi et al (2016) noted that the major factors that influence the selection of African print fabrics are the variety in colours, symbolic motifs, and texture. Dogoe (2013) on the hand, identified price, intended style, and quality to be the influencing factors. These variables were considered during the preparation of the interview and observation guide and served as the bases for generating themes for the research objectives.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents: the discussions were grouped into children and parents.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Item	Frequency	%
School Children	20	100
Gender:		
Boys	4	20
Girls	16	80
Age Range		
5-7	10	50
8-10	10	50

Parents	20	100
Fathers	6	30
Mothers	14	70
Age Range		
20-30	8	40
31-40	12	60
Income GH¢		
1000-2400	3	15
2500 and above	17	85
Education level		
basic	1	5
SHS	1	5
Tertiary	18	90

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Children

All of the 20 children observed and interviewed were schoolchildren from private and public schools. Ten (10) children were from one private school and the other ten (10) were from one public school. The age range used in this study was between 5 to 10 years as required by the use of T.A.T (Gordon et al., 2017). In the same vein, Pandya (2016) explained that Children between the ages of 5-10 years can easily express how they feel about issues, have a positive orientation towards clothing, and can interact with their parents on selection decisions. Thus, supporting the age range explained by Gordon et al (2017) for the use of T.A.T.

As compared to boys, girls tended to express greater interest in clothing about the right clothing choice for reasons of social affiliation (Taylor & Cosenza, 2002). This was reflected in the increase in the number of respondents who were girls. Only seven (7) of the respondents were boys with the rest being girls (13). Pettinger (2005) explains that although there is the dominance of boys for toys like cars, girls preferred dolls and clothing and that the majority of customer service in the fashion industry is feminized.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Parents

Concerning children's desires, they are all directed toward the purchasing power of the parents. The age distribution of the parents who participated in the study was between 28 to 40. The majority of the parents were mothers (14) married (20) and in an income category of GH¢ 2500 and above (average income). More than 16 were in the upper level of professional occupation categories. A high percentage of the participants (18) reported having earned a Bachelor's degree. Ross & Harradine (2004) report that one's income certainly influences one's purchasing decisions because it determines how much one can afford and also determines one's perspective toward money. Children belonging to a high-income group can spend a high percentage of money on their clothing and high-quality priced brands as compared to low-income groups. Solomon (2004) asserts that income, occupation, and education define one's selection of clothing.

4.3 Research Question 1

What are consumers' views on the types of African prints available on the Ghanaian market?

The question sought to find out the parents' views on the types of African prints available on the Ghanaian market which they use in making their children's clothes. Responses from participants are presented in Table 1.

4.4 Research Question 2

What factors influence the choice of children's wear made in African print fabrics?

This question sought to examine parents' and children's views on factors that will influence their selection of children's clothes made in African print fabrics. Responses from participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Participants' responses on the types of African prints

Main findings

Real wax and Imi wax

Different brands of African prints such as GTP wax prints, Woodin, ATL, Hollandais and Hitarget

Parents often bought Hitarget brand

Table 3. Participants' responses on the factors influencing the choice of children's wear made in African print fabrics

Main findings

Parents first considered colour

Parents considered secondly the cost

Parents then considered the motifs in the African print fabrics

Children first considered the colour

Children Secondly considered the motifs in the African prints

Children then considered the intended style

5. Discussions

The findings of the study are discussed under various headings reflecting the objectives of the study.

5.1 Types of African Print Fabrics

Quality fabrics are a necessity when making children's wear. Ugalo (2015) asserted that African print fabric, also known as Dutch wax print, Ankara, or Kitenge is 100% cotton which plays a vital role in children's wear. According to Roy (2012), cotton has a soft and natural feel that offers comfort, safety, and convenience for children's wear. Therefore, Africans take great pride in the usage of the novel African print. African print fabric is of two main types, which are Real wax and Imi (fancy) wax. Generally, all the parents noted that there are 'two main types of African prints. Parents specifically mentioned 'GTP, Woodin, ATL, Hollandais and Hitarget' which are of real wax and Imi wax origin. This finding supports what Ugalo (2015) found with regard to the types of African prints available on the African market. Additionally, Adeloje (2022) noted that Real wax dominates Ghana, Nigeria, and Ivory Coast markets with China, and Holland producing 90% of all real wax for these markets.

The imi wax, also referred to as fancy, Java print, roller print, 'le fancy or le légos' is printed on only one side of the fabric and may not carry any proverbial concepts of Africanism like the initial real wax print designs. Ugalo (2015) noted that Imi fabrics are produced for mass consumption and are cheaper than real wax print. Fancy fabrics are more intense and richer in colours than real wax prints. Nigeria was the largest producer of Imi wax but China now dominates.

Furthermore, parents explained that 'we identify African print fabrics by their brands and manufacturers' names such as Hollandais, Woodin, Printex, Superwax, GTP, Vlisco, and Nichemwax among others'. In addition, 'the type of African print fabric has a significant impact on its quality in terms of the percentage of cotton in the composition of the fabric'. This supports the findings of Adeloje (2022) that the type and brand of the African prints determine their colour intensity and price. Again, different manufacturers are known by consumers for the quality of prints they produce. Hence, influencing the price of children's wear made from them.

Although the type of African print fabric is of consideration, different brands from different manufacturers have also gained much recognition in recent times. Some brands are known for quality in terms of colorfastness, novelty motifs or patterns, and prestige. Responses from parents indicated that the Hitarget brand was mostly used. This was evident when participants 4 and 5 shared that

'I really use the Hitarget brand'(P4)

'Mostly Hitarget are the types that I use' (P5)

Although there were some differing views on whether the brand has any meaning with quality, the majority of the parents did consider it to have meaning. However, they admitted that children grow fast and will outgrow the

garment in a few years (Schor, 2004). Therefore, embedding in them the values of the African culture through the African print fabric worn is of much more concern than the quality. For prestigious groups, the brand of African print is used to project status (Adeloye, 2022). This finding is consistent with the uniqueness of the different brands as identified by Chichi et al (2016). Nevertheless, Amankwah & Howard (2013) is concerned with the proliferation of poor-quality African print brands on the market which are not able to last after one wash; in that, the colourfastness is poor which causes the dye to bleed and mar the beauty of the motifs in the print. Thus, recommended that government authorities should monitor poor quality brands smuggled into the country which dent the image of the country and create customer dissatisfaction.

5.2 The Factors Influencing the Choice of Children'S Wear Made in African Print Fabrics

The analysis of the T.A.T. with children and interviews conducted with parents revealed the following codes from which the themes emerged. Children's data analysis and discussions were limited to colour, style, and motifs because the parents are the purchasers.

5.2.1 Children

Colour

It was evident that children were greatly influenced by colour of the African Prints fabrics used to sew the dresses. A majority of twelve (12) selected colour as the most influential factor. It is clear that in the lives of children, colour has a salient presence. This was confirmed by their emotions and sample statement such as:

'Mummy, I like this colour red dress'(CH1)

'Aunty, will you make this yellow dress for me? (CH2)

This also shows in their toys, sports paraphernalia, and home accessories among others to convey many psychological messages. One function of colour is the significant emotional responses it carries. Clinicians (Garber et. al, 2003) have asserted that children's use of colour in art, for example, is a manifestation of their underlying emotional status. The choice of colour of dresses selected (T.A.T) by girls was observed to differ from the boys. The boys preferred masculine colours, for example blue, grayish blue, and brown while the girls liked feminine colours like green, orange, red, and yellow. Colour red is associated with anger, aggression, and excitement; green with quietness, and withdrawal; black and other colours with depression or anxiety. In particular, girls were observed to worry more about the right clothing colour choice for reasons of social affiliation (Cardoso et al., 2012).

Style

Style is another important factor that influenced children's selection of their clothes for aesthetic reasons. Out of the 20 children, 5 were first influenced by the style of the garments by making supporting statements such as:

Aunty this style is beautiful (CH. 3)

I will take this style to church (CH 4)

Children's emphasis on a particular style has an influence on the fabric to be used. It may be that children often observe the styles worn by their friends and discuss having the same dresses. If this is true, then this finding supports many previous studies regarding the impact of style on children's clothes (Solomon, 2004). However, with children's wear the comfort in the selected style is essential so that they could move freely while playing and having fun.

Motifs

Chichi, et al. (2016) asserted that the motifs in African print are an influential factor in the selection of the prints. Despite the fact that Amankwah et al (2013) emphasized that most African prints have bold motifs, the size of the motifs, the theme and the pattern arrangements still form the influencing factors when selecting clothing. Two of the children were more fascinated by the motifs in the African print wears than other factors. These prints had butterfly motifs with some applied around the neckline for the girls' dresses and one placed on a plain background on the boy's shirt. They reiterated

Aunty, I like this butterfly (CH 5)

Aunty this butterfly is beautiful (CH 6)

In addition, through mass media, videos, and movies, various characters displayed influence children's clothing choices in African prints having similar characters. Such as having cartoon- character costumes. When selecting children's clothes in African print, parents should select clothing with interesting motifs such as shapes, and sizeable

motifs with interesting characters.

It can, however, be argued that children selected those prints based on the interesting colours which were used to print the butterflies in the African prints and also the style which was consciously desired to suit the fabric.

5.2.2 Parents

A scenario was created to know the factors parents considered when selecting African prints for their children's wear when they entered the market or fabric shop. It was discovered that colour was the first attribute that attracted them. This confirms an earlier study by Garber & Hyatt, (2003) that colour is the most important factor when selecting children's clothing. Similarly, Shi (2013) adds that color influences mood or attitude towards a product and creates a certain image of a product. It is usually used as a direct or indirect estimate of quality.

This was followed by the price of the fabric. Ugalo (2015) noted that real wax is more expensive than Imi wax African prints. However, Adeloye's (2022) findings suggest that for prestigious groups, the brand of African print is used to project status. Therefore, parents selected the children's wear depending on affordability.

Parents also considered the motif of the fabric. This was usually used to determine the style which will be suitable for the wear. This finding agrees with both Chichi et al (2016) and Kitenge (2021) who observed that motif size and layout is one of the main driving forces that influence consumers to choose a particular print for a specific need. This could be an interesting factor considered by the children in the choice of their wear as they are enticed by smaller sizes of motifs with interesting characters.

It can however be argued that these factors are not followed chronologically in parents' choice of children's wear made in African print fabrics. Informed consumers usually select the intended style of their children's wear in magazines, catalogues, or social media and buy the African prints based on the desired style irrespective of the price.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Results from interviews and observations of children's emotions, captured through the use of the Thematic Apperception Test, indicate that mothers play a major role in their children's apparel purchasing decisions. The parents are familiar with the various types of African prints available on the market and they prefer the Hitarget brand the most. The reasons given in support of their preference for African prints relate to their colorful appearance, affordability, and the variety of motifs available for children's wear. It was evident that consumers primarily considered factors such as color, style, cost, and motifs when selecting prints. When designing fabric for children's wear, textile designers should pay attention to several important aspects. These include the quality of the cotton fabric, a range of colors that are popular among children, and the use of interesting motif characters.

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