**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

# INVESTIGATING HOW FOREIGN ANIMATIONS CULTIVATE GENDER ROLES IN GHANAIAN CHILDREN: A CASE STUDY OF MUFASA: THE LION KING

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# DECLARATION

## Student's Declaration

I, **Eyram Ama Amaglo,** declare that this thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

Signature: …….

Date: …….

## Supervisor's Declaration

I, hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the School of Graduate Studies, University of Education, Winneba.

Name of Supervisor: Prof. Andy Ofori-Birinkorang

Signature: …….

Date: ……

# DEDICATION

Dedicated to my son, Otis Nkunim Owusu-Asante Tenkorang - may my journey serve as a source of inspiration to you.

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# ABSTRACT

This study examines how foreign animations, with specific reference to *Mufasa: The Lion King*, cultivates gender role among Ghanaian children. Drawing on Gender Schema Theory and guided by three objectives, the study investigated the gender roles portrayed in the animation, examine children's perspectives of these roles, and explore the socialization agents influencing both the animated content and children's lived experiences. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews and narrative responses with children aged 9–12, complemented by thematic content analysis of the animation. Findings indicate that the animation presents a combination of traditional and evolving gender roles. Male characters are predominantly portrayed as strong leaders, while female characters are largely associated with caregiving roles, alongside counter-stereotypical female representations that challenge conventional norms. Children's interpretations of these portrayals reflect both familiarity with traditional gender expectations and aspirational views of alternative roles, illustrating a transitional gender socialization context in Ghana. In addition, the study reveals that socialization agents such as family, school, and peers play a significant role in shaping how children interpret and internalize gendered messages from the animation. The study concludes that foreign animations simultaneously reinforce and reshape gender expectations among Ghanaian children and underscores the importance of media literacy education, parental guidance, and support for inclusive and locally produced animations to promote equitable gender socialization.

# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Like in most developing nations, children in Ghana seem to consume a significant number of foreign animations or cartoon programs on television (Awinzeligo et al., 2022). According to Silvio (2019) animation is how people express themselves by bringing human qualities like life, power, and personality onto objects, through acts of creation, perception, and interaction. A national survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that with technology providing almost 24-hour media access in children's and teens' daily lives, the time they spend on entertainment media has increased significantly (Rideout et al., 2010). There is a rising influence of animation on children's views and behaviours and other researchers have also observed that continual exposure to films in the manner of Disney's feature-length animations has an effect on children's understanding of the world. This is because when settings are constructed, events, emotions, and potential lessons can have a bigger influence on children than in other media (Turkmen, 2021). It is important to point out that the vast majority of animations found in Ghana are not produced in the country. Instead, they are imported from industry giants like Disney and other foreign animation studios.

The rapid changes in technology and culture during the Information Age are quickly reshaping the media industry, including film and cinema (Musa, 2022). These changes have reduced trade barriers and allowed for the influx of products, including entertainment content, from around the world into developing countries, Ghana included. As a result, Ghanaian children have been exposed to a wide range of animations, while this may seem

harmless at first, it has led to a dominance of foreign content leading to acculturation. Bedekar and Joshi (2020) shed light on the numerous subtle and hidden messages conveyed through animations, most of which go unspoken, such as gender biases, gender stereotyping, sudden violence, unnatural falls and unexpected recoveries without injuries, all of which affect children's minds. Meanwhile decades ago, some researchers observed in their studies how African children were limited in getting access to their local content for entertainment, and so they depend on foreign content and this revealed the position on how these children are often victims of second-hand consumption even as first-hand consumers, because the media content at their disposal rarely reflects their immediate cultural contexts and that even if they qualified as global consumer citizens due to their parents' and guardians' purchasing power, culturally, they remain consumer subjects and must adjust their tastes to the commands of undomesticated foreign media dishes (SADC, 1996, as cited in Nyamnjoh, 2002) and by observation, the situation is not different today.

Bedekar and Joshi (2020) observed that in the past, children used to spend most of their day outdoors, playing games and hanging out with friends. Nowadays, children prefer watching their favourite animations on television. They spend hours sitting or lying in front of the television without any physical activity or social interaction with their peers and in recent times, animations have captured children's attention to a great extent, becoming their main form of entertainment. And while children's exposure to and use of mass media is growing, the age at which they are first exposed to it is declining (Strasburger & Hogan, 2013, as cited in Atabey, 2021).

Türkmen (2021) contends that animations are among the child-oriented media tools that carry explicit and implicit messages and children are active viewers. Aside from sleeping,

media consumption is the second most common activity for children (Reich, 2017, as cited in Okuley, 2023). As a result, children may become more detached from their own cultural heritage, as they are primarily exposed to and influenced by foreign content from early childhood. This can lead to a loss of cultural pride, a weakening of local storytelling traditions and a disconnection from their society. Children who haven't travelled or lived abroad speak with foreign accent as a result of watching animations from infancy and for extended periods of time, first at home, then at day-cares, preschools and in the children services of most churches.

The popularity of foreign animations can negatively impact the local economy and Ghanaian animation studios because these animations cannot compete with resources and marketing power of international giants. As a result, local talent and creativity can be stifled, leading to limited opportunities for Ghanaian animators to produce and showcase their work and contribute to the growth of the domestic animation industry. Meanwhile, Puni-Nyamesem (2021) points out that both the World Health Organization (2019) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) recommend two hours of television viewing for young children. As an alumnus of National Film and Television Institute, (NAFTI), now UniMAC Institute of Film and Television, most of my colleague-trained animators are not producing animations because of reasons such as limited resources and lack of infrastructure.

An instance of a negative impact of foreign animations on Ghanaian children is the decline in traditional storytelling practices. In Ghana, storytelling has long been a cherished cultural tradition, where elders pass down oral histories, folktales and moral lessons to younger generations. "By the fire side", a popular children's program was one of such I

grew up watching and we could not wait for the scheduled time to enjoy it. These folktales can be incorporated into animations for children. However, with the proliferation of foreign animations, children are increasingly drawn to the visually captivating and easily accessible content on television, which seems to be leading to a diminished interest in traditional storytelling. This does not only reduce cultural values but also limits the transfer of local wisdom and knowledge from one generation to the next thereby losing some aspect of the Ghanaian cultural heritage.

The majority of early animations in Ghana were used in documentaries and educational films as animated graphics for title sequences or animated inserts (Callus, 2018). The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation began showing a range of programs catered to specific age groups in the 1970s. For younger children, the popular puppet program "Koliko" re-enacted adventure tales with the help of kid-friendly characters. Some of the stories were Ananse Tales, a category of traditional folktale that was quite popular with children (Osei-Hwere, 2008).

The National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), which was founded in 1979 is noted for bringing animation into prominence in the Ghanaian media. Even though the original animations produced by NAFTI such as the "National Mobilization and Building" and the "Road Safety Campaign" were shorter, more informative in nature, and were commissioned by the Ministry of Education (Callus, 2018), this original purpose was observed to have shifted to the additions of animations in music videos and television commercials like the well-known GLICO advert with the falling character from the 1990s. Animations are not primarily produced for children, despite popular belief, animation can be enjoyed by all ages (Karmakar & Bhadra, 2023) but because of its innovative and

colourful design, exaggerated movements, and open plots, children are more likely to find it fascinating. Also, magic and fantasy produce unbelievable worlds, people, and events which are typically the focus of animated works so children are more interested in it.

Ghanaian local children's television programs have greatly decreased over the years and a look at the television program lineups attests to this. Foreign animations on television to target children in Ghana, a country known for its free and vibrant media landscape is becoming alarming, especially given the many television channels that broadcast these animations daily, while television has been shown to greatly impact viewers of all ages, children are increasingly drawn to cartoons and play a key role in shaping their behaviour and intellectual growth and that, children spend an average of over an hour each day watching cartoons, most often under no supervision or guidance from parents or other adults (Awinzeligo et al., 2022).

By observation, children imitate the voices of animated characters; some even speak and behave like their favourite characters. Some of these characters, including Superman, Batman, and others, have been turned into merchandise by the creators of these foreign animations. They are found on sneakers, books, lunch bags, school backpacks and other items. Children's get-togethers are less enjoyable without animated themes.

Meanwhile, in 1965, when President Kwame Nkrumah inaugurated Ghana Television, he explained that its main purpose was to support education and help citizens develop interest in the world around them. He emphasized that television should not focus on cheap entertainment or commercial interests but should serve education in its widest and most meaningful sense. Nkrumah also described television as an important tool for national development, meant to educate, inform, entertain, and enlighten the public. He further

stated that it was the government's responsibility to ensure that television broadcasts were accessible to all citizens (Alhassan, 2005) and children were not left out.

In her account of the history of children's television in Ghana, Osei-Hwere (2008) described how in the 1990s, a new children's program was typically introduced every two years. Ghana's television tried to meet the requirements of children as a specific audience, and those initiatives included cultural and entertainment shows (Osei-Hwere, 2008). A survey conducted in 2018 on television ownership in households in Ghana showed that, the average ownership percentage of television sets in Ghana is 60.4%. The Greater Accra region had the largest number of television sets at 83.1%, while the Upper West region had the lowest concentration at 32.9 % (Sasu, 2021). Likewise, at the end of the first quarter of 2023, the total number of television operators authorized by the National Communications Authority (NCA) to operate in Ghana was 164 (NCA, 2023). By observation, one would think that the increase in television operations in Ghana would reflect in the increase of locally produced programs for children.

According to Aley and Hahn (2020), universally, findings across a wide body of study have also suggested that media targeted at children regularly depict characters according to stereotypical gender roles and that childhood is a particularly sensitive time in gender identity development. Some scholars have also argued "gender is a fact" that we can know from birth (Airton, 2024; Lindqvist et al., 2021). Other scholars argued "gender is a process" and that being a man or a woman is more than just biological facts (Airton, 2024; Kriger & Keyser-Verreault, 2022).

Notably, messages about gender influence children's opinions, behaviours, and experiences from early childhood (Patterson & Vannoy, 2024). Also, gender roles have

been conceptualized as being products of social and psychological constructs rather than biological factors. This affects career choices, the roles taken on as workers, spouses, or parents, and many other areas of life. (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2016). But Pinho and Gaunt (2024) have described the ideology behind gender roles as being individuals' viewpoints regarding the establishment of societal roles for women and men based on their sex and further states the three primary categories of gender role ideology as traditional, transitional, and egalitarian. The ideologies were further explained as traditional representing customary beliefs about gender roles, where men for instance assume breadwinning responsibilities and women primarily handle domestic duties, where transitional represents an intermediary stance, acknowledging evolving gender norms while not fully embracing complete equality. Distinctively, egalitarian ideology advocates for gender-neutral roles, advocating for equal opportunities and responsibilities for both men and women in all spheres of life, whether in the workplace or at home (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2016; Pinho & Gaunt, 2024).

Harber (2013) asserts that for ages, society has perpetuated traditional gender roles and that much of Western societal norms stem from Judeo-Christian beliefs, and that these rooted gender roles have been evident in literature spanning from the early 17th century to the early 21st century but one can observe a positive change of these ideas. Additionally, Kallio (2023) also argued that as Western societal changes unfold, ideologies and norms evolve accordingly so with regard to gender stereotypes and norms, one could say that the world is progressing towards greater equality and openness.

Conversely, on the African continent, Moagi and Mtombeni (2021) contend that in pre-colonial southern Africa, women were not confined to domestic duties or subjected to

oppression, but rather, they held significant positions in production, religion, and politics. And that their involvement extended prominently into the public realm, assuming roles such as princesses, queen mothers, and advisors in politics, and serving as prophets, diviners, and rainmakers in religious spheres. Similarly, history on gender in pre-colonial West Africa have also argued that women were not a homogenous group solely relegated to the domestic duties and that they actively contested, negotiated, and transformed their societies through their diverse roles in the political, social, religious, and economic field (Amoah-Boampong & Agyeiwaa, 2021).

Furthermore, Agbaje (2021) also contends that although historians and feminist writers have explained the complementary roles of men and women during pre-colonial African periods, the beginning of colonial administration profoundly changed existing intergroup structures and that colonial institutions unreasonably favoured men over women, the deliberate neglect of women by colonialists in Africa resulted in significant consequences for African females compared to their male counterparts in society and this neglect serves as an antecedent to present day differences in gender relations (Agbaje, 2021).

In Ghana, where traditional cultural values are still intersecting with modern influences, are children gradually moving away from traditional gender roles into transitional and egalitarian gender roles? If so, then there is a need to investigate how foreign animations on television can cultivate gender roles in Ghanaian children. It is generally believed that children construct their worldviews when exposed consistently to certain images (Perera, 2023), and depending on what they see could influence their behaviour negatively. Therefore, creating the legal rights and protection of children in Ghana is taken seriously and, it is well defined in its Children's Act of 1998 and the 1992 Constitution in article 28,

that a child is “every person under the age of eighteen years” which strictly adheres to the UN Convention on the Rights and Protection of the Child.

Also, according to Maddox (2024), biologically, childhood is the period of growth leading up to adolescence, which typically begins between ages 10 and 13. During this time, puberty initiates bodily changes that prepare the body for adulthood. While certain parts, like the brain, may still be developing, you begin moving beyond your childhood self, gaining greater control over your emotions and developing a stronger sense of autonomy. Meanwhile, socially, adolescents are often regarded as children until they reach the legal age of adulthood. This age varies across cultures but is commonly set between 18 and 21. Although biological maturity may have occurred, adolescents typically continue to experience growth and development and may not yet be fully prepared to navigate the responsibilities of adult life. Within childhood, there are multiple stages such as infancy which begins from birth to age one to two, early childhood starts around age two and lasts until age eight, middle childhood spans the ages of 9 to 12, and adolescence covers the teenage years of 13 to 18. But new studies show that adolescence may extend to age 24 (Maddox, 2024).

When children are born, socialization begins. Nickerson (2024) describes socialization as a lifelong process through which individuals learn the skills, values, beliefs, and behaviours needed to function in society. This process shapes people’s interactions, sense of self, and social identity, with agents such as family, peers, schools, religious institutions, and the media playing a key role in transmitting societal norms and influencing individual development and worldviews. Against this background, the present study examines the ways in which the media, particularly foreign animations can influence the construction of

gender roles among Ghanaian children, with particular attention to those in middle childhood. Using Gender Schema Theory as a framework with themes associated with traditional, transitional, and egalitarian gender role ideologies, the study explores how continuous exposure to foreign animations specifically *Mufasa: The Lion King* can inform children's understanding of gendered behaviours and the socialization agents associated with these understandings within the Ghanaian cultural setting.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The continued exposure of children to foreign animations presents a significant concern, particularly for cultural identity and gender socialization. In Ghana, as in many developing countries, children are major consumers of imported animated films, most of which originate from Western studios such as Disney (Musa, 2022; Rideout et al., 2010). Far from being purely entertainment, animation functions as a powerful socializing tool, carrying explicit and implicit messages that shape children's perceptions of social norms, moral ideals, and gender roles (Bedekar & Joshi, 2020; Türkmen, 2021). When children play, they imitate the characters they admire, reinforcing the behaviours, mannerisms, and roles modeled by likable protagonists, projected images, and popular merchandise (Garabedian, 2015). Ghilzai et al. (2017) also found that about 70% of children observed engaged in fantasy play reflecting animated content, demonstrating its direct impact on the acquisition of social and moral understanding. The problem, therefore, is that foreign media can subtly cultivate gender norms that may diverge from or even displace indigenous Ghanaian expectations, influencing children's identity formation during critical developmental periods (Musa, 2022; Nyamnjoh, 2002).

Disney films frequently portray male characters as active, leadership-oriented, and adventurous, while female characters are depicted as nurturing, passive, or dependent (Karmakar & Bhadra, 2023; Shawcroft et al., 2022; Wardaniningsih & Kasih, 2022). Animation's ability to influence children is amplified by persuasive storytelling, emotional engagement, and repeated exposure, which, as Bedekar and Joshi (2020) note, can shape values, behaviour, and gendered self-perceptions.

In the Ghanaian context, studies document a significant decline in locally produced children's programming over the past decades (Gerning, 2013; Osei-Hwere, 2008), leaving a media landscape dominated by imported content. Scholars argue that television should be viewed as a cultural system, capable of exaggerating and transmitting specific cultural identities and norms (Davin & Jackson, 2008; Barker, 1999, as cited in Puni-Nyamesem, 2021). Research also indicates that children imitate animation characters in ways that influence social behaviours, including both positive outcomes like language development and potentially negative effects such as antisocial tendencies (Awinzeligo et al., 2022). Esseku et al. (2023) emphasize animation's potential for cultural preservation, yet note that globalization and foreign media dominance pose challenges to maintaining indigenous values. While scholars have documented what is broadcast and what children watch, little is known about how children actively make sense of gendered narratives and integrate them into their developing social identities.

This study addresses this gap by investigating how foreign animations cultivate gender roles among Ghanaian children. It situates itself at the intersection of global media influence, child cognitive development, and the socio-cultural realities of Ghana. Guided by Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981), the research explores not only the content of the

animation but also how children in middle childhood (ages 9-12) perceive, negotiate, and incorporate gendered messages into their own lives. By focusing on Disney's *Mufasa: The Lion King* (2024) and conducting interviews with six children, the study moves beyond content analysis to provide a child-centered understanding of media's role in shaping gender identity, thereby adding to literature on childhood socialization, media effects, and gender in Ghana.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

The following are the objectives for the study:

1. To investigate the various gender roles in the selected children's animation.

2.To analyze children's perspectives on the gender roles in the selected animation.

3. To examine the socialization agents reflected in the gender roles in the selected children's animation and in the children's real-life experiences.

### 1.4 Research Questions

The following are the research questions for the study:

1. What are the various gender roles in the selected children's animation?

2. What are children's perspectives on the gender roles in the selected animation?

3. What are the socialization agents reflected in the gender roles in the selected children's animation and in the children's real-life experiences?

### 1.5 Significance of Study

The study highlights the views of some Ghanaian children, their experience of foreign animation and how it is cultivating gender roles in them. This research serves as additional knowledge for further research on children's media, particularly animations. It can contribute to academic scholarship by adding valuable insights into the intersection of media studies, gender studies, cultural studies, and child development.

Also, the findings of this study can inform policy-making initiatives aimed at regulating and or promoting certain types of foreign animations on television and this can promote media literacy. In addition, the understanding of children's awareness of gender roles in foreign animations can help Ghanaian animators to develop content that reflects their taste. Furthermore, the study can create awareness for parents, and educators about the gender roles their children are cultivating and help guide them accordingly.

### 1.6 Scope of the Study

This study aims to investigate how foreign animations on television cultivate gender roles in Ghanaian children. Given the qualitative nature of this research, a sample size of 6 children aged 9 to 12 years was purposively sampled (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). This sample group is in the middle childhood category and one main characteristic of this category is that they start to think more about their future (Maddox, 2024). The 6 children comprised 3 boys and 3 girls. The study centers on the animation *Mufasa: The Lion King*, selected because it was among the top five box-office animated films of 2024, making it a popular and relevant media text for children (Zahed, 2024).

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews to allow for in-depth exploration of children's perspectives. The study was guided by Gender Schema Theory which explains

how children actively process and organize these messages into cognitive frameworks. This theory is applied to interpret the findings rather than to test or modify them.

The legal age frame of who a child is, (Children's Act, 1998; the 1992 Constitution of Ghana), "Gender as a fact" (Airton, 2024; Lindqvist et al., 2021) and the concept of animation and cartoons as the same are what applies to this research.

The study is geographically and culturally limited to Ghana, with findings based on a small sample at a single point in time. As such, the results are not intended for statistical generalization but to provide contextual and theoretical insights into children's gender socialization.

### 1.7 Organization of the Study

This study is structured into five interrelated chapters. Chapter One introduces the study, presenting the background, problem statement, research objectives, questions, significance, scope, and the overall organization of the work. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature on gender, childhood, animations, socialization agents and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Chapter Three details the research methodology, including the approach, design, sampling methods, data collection procedures, and data analysis plan. Chapter Four presents and discusses the study's findings. Finally, Chapter Five provides a summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendations, suggestions for future research, and outlines the study's limitations.

# CHAPTER TWO

# REVIEW OF LITERATURE

## 2.0 Introduction

This study investigates how foreign animations cultivate gender roles in Ghanaian children. This chapter reviews relevant literature on the following topics: a short history of children's programming in Ghana, a short history of animation in Ghana, children, television, and animations, a brief historical and modern perspective on childhood, stages of childhood, understanding gender; gender roles, the evolution of gender in African and Western societies, the representation of gender in animation, gender socialization, agents of gender socialization, theoretical framework and ethical considerations guiding the study.

## 2.1 Short History of Children's Programming in Ghana

In his inaugural speech, Nkrumah declared that Ghanaian television would be used to enrich educational programs and spark an active interest in the world. He stated it would not accommodate cheap entertainment or commercialism, and its primary goal would be education in its broadest and purest sense. He emphasized the importance of the television service being African in view and content; even when reflecting international experiences, it would remain targeted to Ghana's and Africa's requirements. He further stated the service would represent and promote Ghana's highest national and social ideals (Alhassan, 2005).

In her account of the history of children's television in Ghana, Osei-Hwere (2008) described how Ghanaian television tried to meet children's needs as a specific audience, with education as a primary objective. These initiatives included cultural and entertainment

shows on radio and television, as well as radio broadcasts to schools to supplement the curriculum. Osei-Hwere noted that when television was first introduced in Ghana in 1965, efforts were made immediately to use the medium to reach a diverse audience, despite television program creation being more expensive than radio (as cited in GBC, 1985).

According to her, for many years after its introduction, television broadcasts lasted fewer than ten hours a day, yet there were still shows that catered specifically to children. The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation started airing a variety of shows in the 1970s for different age groups. Examples of programs produced for children in the first 20 years include "Koliko," a popular puppet show for younger children that used puppets to recreate adventure stories; "Ananse Tales," classic folktales featured in some stories; and "Children's Own," an educational-entertainment program for children aged 5 to 15 that aired from the late 1970s to early 1980s (Osei-Hwere, 2008, as cited in GBC, 1985). She further noted programs that taught children aged 10 to 15 key scientific ideas, citing "Young Scientist" as an example, which received international recognition in 1967 and 1968 after winning a children's educational program prize in Japan.

She also mentioned programs created to address adolescent concerns, such as "Builders of Today," a youth-oriented magazine program that aired from the 1980s through the 1990s. Although these shows were created in the first two decades, some had a longer shelf life, and there were periods when more hours were allocated to children's programming than to other genres (Osei-Hwere, 2008). Heath (1996) found that by 1994, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation was airing seven locally created children's programs weekly for most of the year, including "Toddler's Time," "Hobby Time," "Kyekyekule," "By the

Fireside," "2nd Generation," "Dos Computer Byte," and "Brilliant Science & Math Quiz" (as cited in Osei-Hwere, 2008).

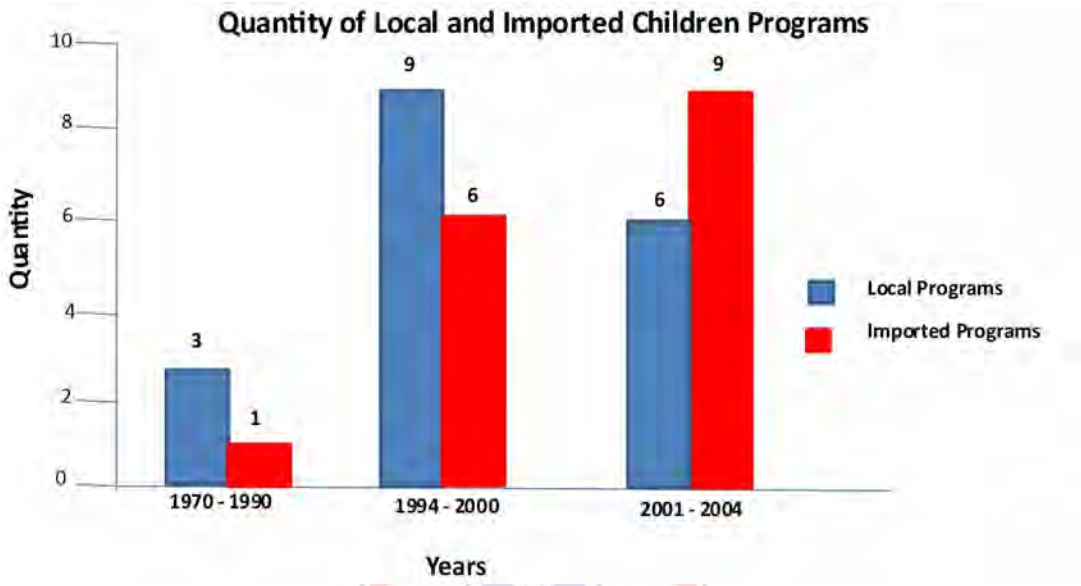
Osei-Hwere (2008) added that during the 1990s, new children's programming was typically introduced every two years. For example, "Kiddie Quiz" for learners in 10th through 12th grades debuted in 1995, and "Kwasasa" for elementary school-aged children debuted at the decade's end. The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation also aired imported children's programming from Europe, the United States, and other African nations, including cartoons, UNICEF instructional series, and American series like "Sesame Street," "Gummi Bears," "Fresh Prince," "Cosby Show," and "Different Strokes." Ansu-Kyeremeh and Karikari (1998) noted that the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation's monopoly ended in 1995 with the launch of Radio University by the University of Ghana, the first private non-governmental radio station (as cited in Osei-Hwere, 2008).

According to Avery (1993) and Saucier (1996), public broadcasting services were established to promote society's cultural and intellectual development (as cited in Osei-Hwere, 2008). The National Communication Authority (2011) reported that the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, rebranded as Ghana Television, created a separate department focused on children's programs and produced more such programs than others. As of the first quarter of 2023, the total number of TV operators authorized by the National Communications Authority to operate in Ghana was 164 (National Communications Authority, 2023).

From the above account, one might assume that an increase in television operations would correspond with increased locally produced programs for children, but this does not seem to be the case. Today, imported programs have flooded television stations, with animation

taking a comfortable lead. Figure 1 illustrates the quantity of locally produced children's programs against imported ones from 1970 to 2004.

***Figure 1 Total Number of Imported and Local Programs from 1970 -2004.***




Source: Gerning, (2013)

The diagram clearly shows a drastic decrease in locally produced children's programs, particularly from 2001 to 2004, compared with imported programs. Heath (1997) found that children were considered an important audience when television was introduced in 1965, leading to particular consideration for creating local programming and carefully selecting imported shows. When television transmission began, Ghana's only station, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, ensured children saw programs that aided their moral, social, and intellectual development (as cited in Gerning, 2013).

## 2.2 Short History of Animation in Ghana

Animation is how people express themselves by bringing human qualities like life, power, and personality onto objects through creation, perception, and interaction (Silvio, 2019). Globally, animation developed after the invention of cinema, and Ghana is no exception. Early animation in Ghana was typically used as animated graphics for title sequences or inserts in documentaries and educational films. The National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), established in 1978 and becoming a regional organization in 1985, is credited with increasing the prominence of animation in Ghana (Callus, 2018).

As the only film school in sub-Saharan Africa at the time, NAFTI also provided training to other nations. Callus (2018) noted that NAFTI's animations in 1978 were more instructional, often commissioned by the Ministry of Education, and relatively short. Examples include the "Road Safety Campaign" and the "National Mobilization and National Building" campaign. NAFTI was also the only institution accredited to grant a diploma in animation and film studies, leading to a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree awarded by the University of Ghana. It is currently a faculty under the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UniMAC), known as the UniMAC Institute of Film and Television.

Callus (2018) also noted that the Friedrich Ebert Foundation contributed to and supported educational programs on local television. Its Ghana office, established in Accra in 1969, aimed to promote democratic processes. Unfortunately, a fire in the Broadcasting Corporation's audiovisual library in 1993 destroyed traces of these early animations. Edward Abebrese was among the first animators to collaborate with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on educational broadcasts. A recent graduate of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Abebrese was chosen with others to form a group trained under

German animators working with the science educational unit. They mostly created inserts for science shows like “Carbon Cycle,” “Power,” “Timber,” “Xylophone for Dancing,” “Backyard Industry,” and “Cocoa.”

NAFTI was instrumental in producing Ghana’s and Africa’s earliest world-class animators, including David Ababio, Alexander Bannerman, Prof. Charles DaCosta, Samuel Quartey, Kwesi Appau, and E.T. Mensah. At the time, NAFTI possessed one of only 12 animation rostrums in the world, the only one in Africa, produced by the manufacturer Crass. This type of rostrum was used to produce George Orwell’s animated *Animal Farm* (1954), directed by John Halas and Joy Batchelor.

According to Callus (2018), in 2007, Samuel Quartey, then an animation lecturer at NAFTI, founded “Animation Africa” to promote animation through screenings, encourage local studios, and provide workshops in schools. Animation Africa also established the ANIMAFRIK animation festival, which began in 2008 and runs annually in Accra, Ghana, showcasing animations from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and the diaspora.

Callus (2018) noted that the landscape in Ghana had changed dramatically by 2016. A new generation of animators learned about computer animation (2D or 3D) through online social networking groups, uploading and self-promoting their work on video streaming sites like YouTube. Cycil Jones Abban, a pharmacist by profession, entered animation and set up Parables Animation Studio, producing short animations inspired by Ghanaian stories like “Anansi Tales” (2015-2016) and “Storytime in Akwaaba,” screened on local television. Francis Yushau Brown created “Agorkoli” (2015) while studying at NAFTI, depicting the migration of the Ewe people from the wicked king Agorkoli. Other notable animators who established studios include Alex Bannerman and Kofi Sarpong (Akroma

Productions in the early 1980s) and Zingaro Productions in the 1990s, creator of the popular drug-awareness animation "Akwadaa woko hen." The iconic GLICO Life Insurance television commercial featuring a falling man also became a staple of Ghanaian TV advertising.

Callus (2018) concluded her study by examining the work of Comfort Arthur, a Ghanaian artist residing in the UK who studied animation at the Royal College of Arts, London. Her works include the award-winning "The Peculiar Life of a Spider" (2015), inspired by Ananse tales; "Imagine" (2016), a short poetry animation about the kidnapped Chibok girls in Nigeria; "Black Barbie" (2016); and "Untitled" (2017), about stories of sexual harassment.

In recent years, notable animations have been produced, such as three animated films exploring Ghana's heritage and culture as part of the Sankofa Support Project to Higher Education and Research in Heritage and Tourism. Produced in May 2021 in conjunction with Ghanaian animation studios, a French animated series, and Ghanaian scholars, the films are "Salvage Archaeology" (60 seconds), "Fort Amsterdam" (5 minutes), and "Begho" (7 minutes). They were translated into eight languages: English, French, Asante Twi, Fante Twi, Ewe, Ga, Dagbani, and Hausa (French Embassy in Ghana, 2021).

In February 2022, Ghana's first feature animation film, "28, The Crossroad," a 55-minute film produced over 37 months, was released. It explores the Christiansburg Crossroad shooting incident involving three World War II veterans. In December of the same year, "Asantewaa," another animated feature, was released, exploring the story of Yaa Asantewaa, the Ashanti queen mother who led the fight against the British over the Golden Stool in 1900 (Myjoyonline, 2022).

According to Aryeetey-Mensah (2023), as animation grows as an exciting global art form, Ghana is connecting to the movement with several talented studios and individual animators. This growth is linked to more skilled artists, better access to technology, and government support. One leading studio, AnimaxFYB Studios, focuses on projects that support social change and is known for its "Mmofra" animations. The NGO Girls in Animation provides resources, training, and events to support women in this male-dominated industry (Aryeetey-Mensah, 2023).

Aryeetey-Mensah (2023) noted that Ghana boasts several skilled independent animators, such as Karen Happuch, who produced the children's series "Shine and Sweetside," a short film highlighting the sensitive topic of suicide. Her work, along with that of four other animators, was featured at the Annecy Festival in France in 2023. Aryeetey-Mensah also reported that five Ghanaian studios showcased their work at the prestigious Pitch Partners session of the 2023 Annecy Festival for the first time in Ghana's animation history. Representatives included Karen-Happuch P. Henneh (KHPH Studios), Jesse Sunkwa-Mills (Mills Media), Emmanuel (SurfGhana Collective), Sarpei Kwadey and Nii Ofei Dodoo (Indigene BROS), and Najilau Dramundu and Rudolf Zeglo (9th March Studios). Their showcased works—"Abrefi Koto," "Asantewaa, Fa Ma ɔmo," "SOAN" (Soul of a Nation), and "Talata"—highlighted Ghana's cultural heritage and the animation industry's future. In January 2023, Alliance Française in Accra hosted the MIFA Campus International – Talents workshop, an international training course for animation professionals, organized by the Annecy International Animation Film Festival and MIFA in partnership with the French Embassy in Ghana, providing mentorship to Ghanaian animators.

Aryeetey-Mensah (2023) emphasized that participation in the Pitch Partners session was a significant achievement, providing visibility to industry professionals exploring fresh content and demonstrating the Ghanaian animation industry's rising potential and openness to international partnerships and investment.

### 2.3 Children, Television, and Animations

Children's exposure to television and animations is a subject of growing interest and concern as the global media landscape evolves. Television serves as a primary medium for children's entertainment, education, and socialization, with both positive and negative implications for their development. While it offers valuable learning opportunities, the content children are exposed to can significantly shape their perceptions of the world, their cultures, and their behaviours.

From a global perspective, Bandura (1977) noted that children seek content matching their existing preferences and that not all television shows are the same; what children watch is more important than how much they watch. He argued that the message is more important than the medium itself. Baumann and Siebert (1993) noted that the media can function effectively as mediators only when they give equal attention to all sides, present each viewpoint accurately and without bias, and highlight areas where peaceful compromise is possible. This context of conflict resolution underscores television's potential benefits. Children should have a say in what they watch and be exposed to a balanced view of the world, starting with their own culture before expanding to others. Currently, the playing field appears uneven.

Media researcher Gerbner (1993) observed that mass media, especially television, play a central role in shaping contemporary culture, producing constant, repetitive, and

entertaining images. For the first time in history, most stories were told to children by distant corporations rather than parents, schools, or churches (as cited in Bielby & Harrington, 2015). Anderson et al. (2001) suggested that children actively shape their development by choosing their environments and activities, which helps explain long-term media effects.

Lacroix (2004) investigated how Disney's portrayals of gender and cultural differences serve its commercial agenda, encouraging children to invest emotionally and materially in these portrayals, which reflect larger social and historical narratives about race and gender. Ivrendi and Özdemir (2010) focused on mothers' perspectives of animation's effects on young children. Through a questionnaire survey of 223 mothers of preschool and kindergarten children, they found that a mother's education level, the child's age, and the amount of co-viewing time influenced perspectives of animation's impact, emphasizing the importance of parental involvement in mitigating negative effects.

Kunkel and Wilcox (2012), studying American children, observed that policymakers and child protection advocates focused primarily on television because it was ubiquitous in households, and children spent significant time watching it from a very young age. Their study noted extensive research demonstrating children's vulnerability to certain messages, with the public and policymakers viewing children as a special audience requiring protection from potential harm. This protection is justified by children's lack of experience and ongoing moral, emotional, and cognitive development, which makes them more vulnerable to negative consequences.

Yousaf et al. (2015) discovered the influence of television commercials and animations on children's behaviour in Gujrat City, Pakistan, finding that popular animations like *Ben*

*10* influenced children's language and preferences, often leading them to choose watching animations over physical activities. Anuradha and Kannan (2016) investigated how animations have become a favourite entertainment for children, with over 50% of animation viewers being children. Their study on the influence of American animations on Indian children noted how cultural values from shows like *Chhota Bheem* and *Ben 10* shaped perceptions and behaviours, leading children to adopt foreign cultural traits.

Ghilzai et al. (2017) studied the effects of constant exposure to animations, noting that while animations can improve language and cognitive skills, they can also lead to aggressive behaviour when children imitate violent characters. They advised parents to monitor content closely to avoid negative behavioural consequences. Similarly, Öznacar et al. (2018) explored the effects of violent television programs on preschool children and parental attitudes, finding that exposure depended on the type and duration of programs watched. They also observed that many children's programs prioritized entertainment over educational value, a concern raised by parents.

UNICEF Montenegro (2018) campaigned to raise awareness about the media's effects on children's development due to their massive media exposure. The campaign cited studies showing how media violence can increase aggression and how educational television can teach vital skills. It acknowledged that early exposure to foreign societal content has long-term cultural effects and invoked the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which mandates keeping harmful content away from children while advocating for children's right to participate in media choices and be heard. The campaign argued that media education and regulation should not be mutually exclusive.

Bilis and Bilis (2019) investigated how some children's television networks use animations to impart social and moral values, highlighting the role of locally produced animations in promoting national values and suggesting television can be a responsible educational tool. Şahin and İlhan (2019) studied how children perceive animated characters, finding that they are drawn to characters with positive traits and magical powers. Despite the popularity of national characters in Kayseri, Turkey, international characters dominated, and gender significantly influenced preferences.

Bedekar and Joshi (2020) shed light on subtle, hidden messages in animations, such as gender biases, stereotyping, sudden violence, and unnatural recoveries, which affect children's minds. They argued that children are forced to accept these as normal in animations and may inappropriately apply them to real-life scenarios, potentially harming mental health as children struggle to leave the fantasy world.

Sultan and Hasan (2020) studied the impact of foreign animation programs on Pakistani children, observing that depictions of violence contributed to aggressive behaviour and shifted social attitudes. Many children imitate foreign characters, weakening cultural values, and parents are often unaware of these harmful effects.

Bedekar and Joshi (2020) also observed that children now prefer watching animations for hours over outdoor play, reducing physical activity and social interaction, making animations their main entertainment form. Mahmood et al. (2020) explored how violent animations affect behaviour, finding that children absorb both positive and negative behaviours, with television being the main exposure medium. They argued that animations significantly shape personality, especially in young, vulnerable children who may imitate

admired characters, potentially developing fear, anxiety, or antisocial tendencies, particularly when unsupervised.

Hamelink (2023) argued that although the League of Nations made declarations on children's rights in 1924, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, finalized in 1989, empowered member states to ensure that children capable of forming their own views can express them in all matters affecting them. However, adults make decisions about the environment, climate, global warming, migration, diseases like COVID-19, the economy, war, and peace—decisions concerning the future world children will inhabit, yet children's viewpoints are often overlooked. He emphasized listening to, consulting, and involving children as crucial responsibilities under the Convention.

Bozzola et al. (2018), Kabali et al. (2015), Holloway et al. (2013), and Strasburger and Hogan (2013) argued that while children's exposure to mass media is growing, the age of first exposure is declining (as cited in Atabey, 2021). Türkmen (2021) observed that animations are child-oriented media tools carrying obvious and unspoken messages, and children are active viewers. Türkmen (2021) further argued that animation's growing influence on children's views and behavior is undeniable, with numerous studies confirming its impact. Fouts et al. (2006) noted that feature-length animations may promote stronger character identification than series (as cited in Türkmen, 2021). Additionally, Türkmen argued that continual exposure to films like Disney's feature-length animations affects children's understanding of the world because constructed settings, events, emotions, and potential lessons have a greater influence than other media. Mastro and Ortiz (2008) argued that children mimic animation characters because "strong and prominent

characters have greater effects on viewers' attitudes and perceptions" (as cited in Türkmen, 2021).

Taj and Kalsoom (2021) examined how animations influence behaviour, concluding that they can negatively affect language and behaviour, especially in speech and social interaction. They suggested creating animations with moral and social values and active parental guidance, especially from mothers. Similarly, Dattaa et al. (2022) observed that growing exposure to electronic media, including animations, significantly affects behaviour. Children's behaviour could be negatively affected by extended unsupervised viewing, with parental absence often leading to inappropriate behaviour, bad language, and poor social interactions.

Akgül et al. (2024) conducted a study to examine whether viewing animated content could reduce pain and distress in young children during blood sample collection. Studying 81 children aged 3 to 6 years (41 watching animation, 40 not), they found that those watching animation felt less pain and cried for a shorter time. Maharjan (2025) observed technology's growing role in children's lives, with toddlers frequently exposed to smartphones and smart TVs. Violent animations are increasingly a dominant entertainment source, and their depictions of fighting and killing can increase hostility, nervousness, and sleep disturbances, causing emotional and psychological harm.

Hussain and Saeed (2025) explored how mothers observe and manage their children's engagement with animations, focusing on intervention strategies. Studying 20 children aged 5 to 8, they found that children watched more animations on weekends, but mothers used strategies like involving children in chores, storytelling, and art activities to manage screen time.

Jensen's (2024) book, *Histories of Children's Television Around the World*, edited by Yuval Gozansky, brings together scholars and producers to explore the history in twelve countries across five continents. It covers issues between public and private broadcasting, the influence of global content like *Sesame Street*, animation's role, the impact of legislation and streaming platforms like Netflix, the role of women, growing content diversity, and globalization's effects, with some countries resisting foreign content and others experiencing a local production rebirth. It also discusses the COVID-19 pandemic's impact, shifting consumption to online streaming and educational content, and providing a comprehensive overview of global children's television evolution.

On the African continent, Adjeketa (2015) explored animation's influence on children's development in Nigeria, finding that foreign animation dominance often detached children from cultural and religious roots, promoting alien values over local heritage. Inaddition, Akanbi and Saadu (2024) investigated the impact of local animations on skill acquisition among pre-primary school children in Kwara State, Nigeria, finding locally produced animations significantly improved cognitive, social, physical, and emotional skills compared to conventional teaching, with gender, school type, and location having little effect. Mokua (2024) investigated the relationship between watching Disney animations and prosocial behaviour among children aged 7 to 11 in Nairobi, Kenya, finding that it positively influenced behaviour change, encouraging prosocial behaviours.

Major global animation studios include Pixar Animation Studios ("Toy Story," "Finding Nemo"), Walt Disney Animation Studios ("The Lion King," "Frozen"), DreamWorks Animation ("Shrek," "Kung Fu Panda"), Illumination Entertainment ("Despicable Me," "Sing"), and Blue Sky Studios ("Ice Age," "Rio") (Tyler, 2023). For Africa to compete,

Fayenuwo and Iwuh (2025) investigated challenges and opportunities in Nigeria's animation industry, finding that despite major studios, setbacks like skill gaps, limited infrastructure, and funding constraints persist. Addressing these could unlock its potential as a leading African and global player.

In Ghana, Heath (1997) argued that children's television programs reflected a broader national discourse about shaping culture, emphasizing formal education's role in building national culture, ancestral wisdom for cultural strength, and adapting selected foreign ideas to remain relevant. Analyzing television as discourse, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation was seen as an active participant in a national conversation, though limited by institutional structures, production practices, and creators' class-based perspectives.

Meanwhile, part of Kwame Nkrumah's post-independence vision was to use motion pictures for national cohesion, social and economic advancement, and cultural heritage preservation, recognizing that preserving cultural assets was crucial for safeguarding future generations (Ghana National Media Policy, 2000). SADC (1996) found that even though children might be active media users, they are often passive consumers of content not reflecting their own cultures, as most media available is foreign. Even with global media access, children must adjust preferences to unfamiliar content. Although African media policies acknowledge the importance of children seeing and hearing their own cultures, languages, and experiences to build identity and belonging, this rarely happens (as cited in Nyamnjoh, 2002).

Jempson (2003) noticed the growing interest in media effects on children, hoping it would be stopped by using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a tool to measure children's treatment and make them a key part of human rights discourse, not just learners

fitting into adult society. However, Africa, including Ghana, has not fully lived up to this benchmark. The Ghana Cultural Policy (2004) states that television should project Ghanaian arts, culture, and values, increase national consciousness and self-reliance using indigenous resources, and maintain 70% Ghanaian and 30% foreign content (National Commission on Culture, 2004).

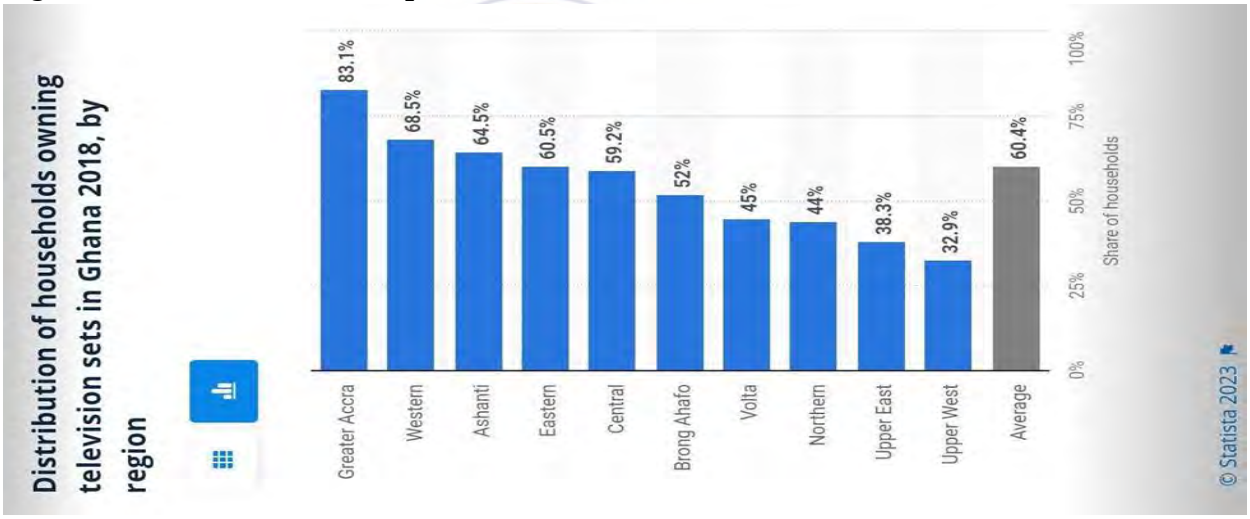
Osei-Hwere (2008) observed that most researchers did not include children's views, the main stakeholders in media-centred research, and recommended that future investigations should. Research on children's perspectives on issues concerning them was limited in Ghana, despite Ghana being the first nation to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. Workalemahu (2008) found that although classifying children as a "special" group for whom adults decide is common, this should not deprive them of the right to express preferences. Keyes and Buckingham (1999) observed that if children are not acknowledged as a social group with diverse interests, intelligence, taste, class, colour, culture, religion, age, and gender, their unique needs are disregarded. Understanding global media roles is crucial if children are acknowledged as potential media consumers, requiring media studies to consider their diverse preferences and needs (as cited in Workalemahu, 2008).

Governments, content creators, and funding organizations are not adequately catering to children's needs. Children's programming must offer choice, include their needs and preferences, and involve continuing research on them as the target audience (Osei-Hwere & Pecora, 2008). Osei-Hwere (2008) assessed the diversity of children's television programs in Ghana and the influence of market structure and stakeholders, finding a decrease in program numbers over the years; by 2004, GTV had a 66% decrease compared

to the previous year. Gerning (2013) found that the three stations studied by Osei-Hwere (2008) had decreased from 89 unique children's programs to 15.

Acheampong (2017) studied how animation affects children aged 6 to 15 in Sunyani, Ghana, focusing on types watched, parental supervision, and impact. Out of 400 children, none had parental supervision, raising concerns about exposure to harmful content without guidance. A Statista survey (2018) found the average television ownership in Ghanaian households was 60.4%, highest in Greater Accra (83.1%) and lowest in Upper West (32.9%).

***Figure 2: Television Ownership in Households in Ghana.***




Source Statista Survey (2018).

Recognizing television's magnitude, Bamfo et al. (2019) investigated how television advertising influences purchasing behaviour of children aged 13 to 18 in Ghana, finding that quality information, information invasiveness, and likable adverts positively affect purchasing behaviour.

Davin and Jackson (2008) and Barker (1999) argued that "that television should be considered a cultural system more than a visual media and as a means to hype well-known cultures, ethnicity, and national identity" (as cited in Puni-Nyamesem, 2021, p. 13). Furthermore, children must be exposed to content reflecting their culture, language, and experiences, as emphasized in the Children's Television Charter from the 1995 World Summit on Television. Additional provisions stress scheduling during available times, accessibility via various media, ample funding for quality production, and acknowledging the significance and fragility of indigenous children's television, with measures to uphold, safeguard, and promote local language content. This position was reinforced at the 1997 Africa Summit on Children's Broadcasting in Accra, emphasizing children's right to high-quality, nonexploitative programs, participation in creation, and promotion of respect for their own and other cultures.

Antwi Danso (2019), Johnson and Puplampu (2008), NAEYC and The Fred Rogers Centre (2012), and Young and Nabuco de Abreu (2017) observed that young children grow up in digital households with abundant, easily accessible screen media (as cited in Puni-Nyamesem, 2021). Notably, Young and Nabuco de Abreu (2017) and UNICEF (2020) observed parents expose children to screen media as early as four months, using technology as a digital nanny, with television being the most popular medium for young children in Ghana (as cited in Puni-Nyamesem, 2021). Meanwhile, Puni-Nyamesem (2021) pointed out that the World Health Organization (2019) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) recommend a maximum of two hours of television viewing for young children.

In promoting Ghanaian cultural heritage, Bonney (2021) explored moral and philosophical messages in three Akan myths, turning one into a 2D animation. The study found these

myths contain traditional beliefs and values, and using familiar visuals, relatable characters, and engaging animation helped children remember and understand deeper messages, showing local animated stories as a powerful educational tool.

Awinzeligo et al. (2022) examined the impact of animations on children's behaviour and language development in Bolgatanga, Ghana, finding that while animations can aid language development, they also significantly impact behaviour, sometimes nurturing antisocial tendencies.

In light of these findings, Esseku et al. (2023) emphasize using animation to preserve and promote Ghana's cultural heritage amidst globalization challenges, ensuring children's programming reflects local cultures, values, and experiences while meeting international standards. However, Okuley et al. (2025) studied how African animations, beyond entertaining, function as socialization tools shaping children's thoughts and behaviours, finding they propagate ideologies like patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, sexualization of women, parent-child power imbalances, and portraying marriage and childbirth as life's ultimate goals, concluding animations play a significant role in spreading specific social ideologies.

From these observations, Ghana once held a clear, deliberate vision for children's programming rooted in education, cultural preservation, and national development. However, the literature suggests a widening gap between this vision and present-day realities. Despite policy frameworks, institutional histories, and television infrastructure growth, children's programming has declined in quantity, cultural relevance, and local ownership, while foreign animations dominate. Although global scholarship acknowledges animation's positive and negative effects, the Ghanaian context reveals a structural

imbalance where children are consumers of imported ideologies rather than participants in culturally grounded storytelling. Importantly, while many studies emphasize protection, regulation, and parental control, fewer genuinely center children's own voices, perceptions, and interpretations, a significant gap given childhood's formative role in identity and gender-role development. Therefore, the problem is not merely exposure to foreign animation but the absence of sustained, well-supported local alternatives reflecting Ghanaian realities and evolving gender norms. This historical decline, coupled with globalization and limited child-centered research, underscores the urgency of investigating how foreign animations cultivate gender roles among Ghanaian children, directly informing this study's problem statement and focus.

### 2.4 A Brief Historical and Modern Perspective on Childhood

Childhood is not a fixed or universal concept but a socially constructed phase shaped by historical, cultural, and societal influences. Its perspective has evolved through philosophical thought, colonial histories, sociological inquiry, and legal frameworks. Early thinkers like John Locke and Philippe Ariès contributed foundational ideas. John Locke (1632–1704) articulated a developmental perspective, introducing the notion of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate shaped by experience (as cited in Uzoigwe & Elias, 2023). Children are born without innate ideas, their minds molded by sensory experience and reflection (Locke, 1970), with education and environment playing critical roles.

Ariès (1962) argued that childhood is not a universal biological stage but a concept emerging in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, where medieval societies viewed children as miniature adults with little role differentiation. Childhood as a separate life stage only began to be recognized in the modern period (as cited in Cunningham, 1998).

Jenks (1996) argued that childhood is a social construct influenced by historical and cultural shifts, with meaning derived from adult-child relationships governed by social rules and expectations. As societies established structured institutions like schools and welfare systems, childhood became more clearly defined and institutionalized. The academic study of childhood, especially in sociology, emerged relatively recently, challenging earlier psychological and universalist perspectives.

Historical records from African societies during European colonization show childhood shaped by local culture. The 20th century has been described as the "century of the child," with increased attention to welfare, education, and rights (James & Prout, 1997, p. 1). Psychology and medicine developed child development frameworks, influencing policy and media. However, the sociology of childhood critiques viewing it as natural and universal, emphasizing its socially constructed nature (Jenks, 1996; Heywood, 2001; Mintz & Raft, 2004; Premo, 2007; Hsiung, 2008, as cited in Lord, 2015).

In colonial Africa, childhood definitions varied by region, influenced by African traditions and European ideologies. Children played significant social, economic, and cultural roles but were excluded from colonial governance. Definitions were shaped by cultural practices like initiation ceremonies and ritual markers such as scarification or puberty rites (Amadé, 1994, as cited in Alanamu et al., 2018), signifying transition to adulthood.

Colonial laws limiting child labour and promoting schooling redefined childhood. Morrison (2015) noted that leisure became increasingly valued, primarily affecting urban middle-class families, while rural and working-class children's labor remained central (as cited in Alanamu et al., 2018). Precolonial play, though informal, was culturally rich, with games reflecting societal roles like nurturing or combat, preparing children for adult

responsibilities (Carton et al., 2014, as cited in Alanamu et al., 2018). Structured leisure emerged under colonial influence, with middle-class children socialized through gender-specific play, girls reading literature reinforcing domestic roles, and boys engaging with tools and games preparing them for public and professional life (Duff, 2015, as cited in Alanamu et al., 2018). Patterns varied in Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt, reflecting local interpretations of colonial ideologies and indigenous values (Alanamu et al., 2018).

Today, international legal frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child institutionalize global childhood norms. In Ghana, the Children's Act of 1998 and Article 28 of the 1992 Constitution define a child as anyone under eighteen, aligning with international standards (New World Encyclopedia, 2021), highlighting childhood as a protected, critical development phase.

Kawthar (2023) argued that rapid technological advancement reshapes childhood experiences, with media exposure influencing cognitive development and moral sensibilities, often introducing adult themes like violence or consumerism early, blurring traditional boundaries and calling for robust regulatory frameworks to preserve childhood as a distinct phase. Psychological perspectives support that children have unique cognitive and emotional characteristics distinguishing them from adults, requiring specialized care, education, and guidance due to developing brains and limited capacity for abstract concepts (BetterHelp Editorial Team, 2024). Biological development, like puberty marks adolescence onset (typically ages 10–13), but cultural definitions often extend into late teenage years, reflecting varying societal norms.

Thus, childhood is not static or universal but deeply embedded in social, historical, and cultural contexts. From Locke's (1970) insights to postcolonial African experiences and

contemporary digital challenges, its construction evolves. Childhood today exists at the intersection of global ideologies, local traditions, and modern media influences. Any meaningful analysis of children's media, identity formation, or gender socialization, particularly in Ghana, must recognize childhood as socially constructed, historically contingent, and culturally negotiated rather than a universal biological stage.

### 2.4.1 Stages of Childhood

According to the BetterHelp Editorial Team (2024), childhood involves major growth and change through distinct stages shaping thinking, emotions, and social skills: infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence.

Infancy (birth to about 1–2 years) is a time of rapid physical growth and sensory learning. Babies explore through touch, sound, and sight, forming close emotional bonds with caregivers crucial for later emotional security and social development.

Early childhood (ages 2–8) involves developing language skills, improving movement and coordination, and beginning social interaction. Children become more independent, aware of their environment, and start learning in structured settings like preschool, building cognitive skills and confidence for future learning.

Middle childhood (ages 9–12) is a turning point where children become more independent, form their identity, and take on more responsibility. Schoolwork becomes more serious, especially in reading and math. Socially, they form deeper friendships, care more about peer acceptance, start understanding complex emotions, and think about their future. This stage is key for developing emotional intelligence and preparing for adolescence.

Adolescence (ages 13–18, sometimes into early twenties) involves major physical and emotional changes, bridging childhood and adulthood. Teenagers think more deeply, make bigger decisions, figure out their identity, take on adult-like responsibilities, and consider their societal place.

Among these, middle childhood stands out as bridging early childhood's learning and social experiences with adolescence's self-discovery and independence (BetterHelp Editorial Team, 2024) and is this study's focus.

### 2.5 Understanding Gender

Mid-century scholars developed overlapping concepts to understand gender. Goffman (1977) argued that gender is an important factor shaping social interactions and structures, contending that differences between men and women are largely created and reinforced by society, not natural. At birth, individuals are categorized by physical features, but societal expectations dictate behaviours, roles, and opportunities. Goffman (1977) argued that gender is a social construct influencing everyday life in rarely questioned ways, with societies amplifying small biological differences to justify significant social divisions.

Scott (1986) argued that words, like ideas, have history and fluid meanings shaped by human creativity and social change. She observed feminists redefined gender to analyze how societies organize relationships between the sexes. Scott (1986) argued that gender is not merely about women but about power relations and how societies construct differences, criticizing traditional historical methods for neglecting gender and advocating its use as a key analytical tool.

Scott (1986) noted that American feminists introduced gender to emphasize its social rather than biological foundation, challenging biological determinism and focusing on the societal construction of femininity and masculinity. Gender also moved beyond women's studies limitations, requiring analysis of relational dynamics between men and women. Davis (1975) argued that gender studies should observe both women and men, just as historians study peasants and elites in class analysis, requiring exploration of how sex roles and sexual symbolism evolve across societies and historical periods (as cited in Scott, 1986).

Gordon et al. (1976) contended that including women in history requires expanding what is considered historically important to include personal and subjective experiences alongside public and political ones, potentially leading to a new way of understanding history itself (as cited in Scott, 1986). Scott (1986) suggested this approach could reform historical understanding, with success depending on developing gender as an analytical tool like class and race.

Gatens (1983) asserted that the distinction between gender and women's history reflected broader feminist scholarship debates. While women's history clearly challenged traditional narratives, gender was embraced for perceived neutrality and alignment with social science methodologies, a 1980s strategic effort to gain academic recognition while expanding analysis beyond a singular focus on women. Gatens (1983) argued that biological differences do not inherently lead to social hierarchies because societies create and reinforce gender roles based on cultural, economic, and political contexts, moving focus from fixed biological differences to how gender is shaped, maintained, and challenged through social norms and institutions (as cited in Scott, 1986).

Scott (1986) argued that while historians increasingly used the word gender as a category of analysis, many treated it in a limited, descriptive manner, discussing new areas like women, families, and social roles without fully integrating it into broader political and economic narratives. She emphasized that gender should be a fundamental analytical tool for understanding power, politics, and social change, with the division between political and domestic spheres itself a gendered construct needing study. Rather than a secondary factor, historians should explore how gender shapes institutions, ideologies, and historical processes.

Nicholson (1986) noted that historians attempted to use theoretical frameworks to analyze gender and historical change, but balancing broad theories with history's evolving nature led to inconsistencies. Some adopted theories without fully understanding consequences, others relied on universal models failing to account for historical differences, and advanced gender research often lacked clear frameworks for future studies. Since many historians did not clearly define applied theories, critical examination was vital (as cited in Scott, 1986).

West and Zimmerman (1987) argued that gender is not an inherent trait but an ongoing social process embedded in daily interactions. They distinguished gender from sex (biology) and sex category (societal labeling), seeing gender as something people *do* through actions, speech, dress, and carriage based on cultural expectations, showing that gender is learned and performed, a social construct playing a big role in societal organization.

Building on earlier research, contemporary scholars expanded understanding by viewing gender as fluid and performative. Acker (1992) noted that gender became central in social

science discourse largely due to feminist efforts to analyze and challenge women's systematic subordination and male dominance. Butler (1999) analyzed gender not as a fixed biological or social category but a performative act, something people actively perform rather than inherently fixed. She challenged the traditional binary, introducing new ways of thinking about identity, power, and resistance, criticizing early feminist approaches for sometimes reinforcing strict, heteronormative gender roles, arguing gender should be seen as a changing, ongoing process, not set at birth.

Kriger and Keyser-Verreault (2022) argued that gender is not fixed or assigned once at birth but an ongoing process shaped by society. While people are given a sex and gender label at birth, these can change as individuals grow and move through different social situations. Through actions, interactions, and responses to cultural norms, people constantly express and shape their gender.

Airton (2024, p. 27) explored two main schools of thought: "gender as a fact" and "gender as a process." The "gender as a fact" perspective argues gender is something we are born with, closely linked to biological sex, with differences coming primarily from natural biological traits rather than societal expectations, seeing gender as fixed and unchanging, determined at birth by physical characteristics. The "gender as a process" perspective sees gender as learned and shaped by social interactions, with individuals socialized into gender roles from birth through family, peers, and society, suggesting gender is not a fixed trait but an ongoing, lifelong process people participate in shaping daily through their own behaviors and responses to others challenging norms.

From early to contemporary scholars, discussions highlight the ongoing debate. While some argue gender is an inherent fact, others believe it is continuously constructed and

reinforced through socialization. The growing emphasis on gender as fluid and a process is especially relevant in today's media-saturated world, where representations constantly shape and reshape norms. This body of literature suggests understanding gender requires moving beyond binary and static definitions toward analyzing how gender is produced, maintained, and contested within specific social and cultural contexts. This interpretation is crucial for studies like this one, examining how children learn and negotiate gender roles through repeated media exposure, particularly animation.

### 2.6 Gender Roles

Money (1973) first used and defined gender role in print in 1955, describing gender roles as behaviours and expressions individuals use to present themselves as male or female, including mannerisms, body language, conversational topics, dreams, fantasies, responses to indirect questions, and sexual practices. While not solely about sexuality, gender role significantly influences adherence to societal expectations of masculinity or femininity.

Eagly and Steffen (1984) noted that common gender stereotypes maintain traditional roles by shaping expectations of women as more caring and community-focused (communal) and men as more assertive and goal-driven (agentic), affecting workplace treatment, leadership roles, and societal views on caregiving and career growth.

Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2016) explained gender role ideology as beliefs about men's and women's societal roles, with three main types: traditional, transitional, and egalitarian. Traditional beliefs emphasize clear differences, with men as breadwinners and women managing home and children. Egalitarian views promote gender not determining roles, with men and women seen as equals sharing professional and domestic responsibilities.

Transitional perspectives fall between, acknowledging shared responsibilities but assuming certain roles are more suited to one gender.

Lorber (2018) suggested gender is so deeply rooted in everyday life that we often do not notice it unless challenged. From a young age, we learn gender roles from parents and caregivers, shaping our sense of gender and even sexual preferences, with social interactions forming personality traits and behaviours based on societal gender roles. Bonvillain (2020) argued that gender is something people actively perform rather than fixed, expressed depending on situation and personal goals, making it flexible. Families are important teachers, as children learn directly from parents and by watching adult interactions, shaping their understanding and expression of gender.

Lindqvist et al. (2021) found that gender is often treated as a simple binary in research and demographics but is much more complex, with many studies not clearly defining it, leading to misunderstandings. Azza (2022) argued that traditional gender stereotypes remain common, with media quietly supporting ideas like women leaders needing men's help, keeping men seen as more powerful.

Shawcroft et al. (2022) explored gender depictions in 61 Disney animated films (1937–2019) and production team gender influence, finding a consistent gender imbalance (60% male, 40% female) across decades. Female characters were more often portrayed as attractive, but intelligence, activity level, and story roles showed no significant gender differences. Films written by women featured more male parents/children; films written by men had more female villains. Women in production contributed to more balanced portrayals, suggesting increased female involvement leads to more nuanced representation.

Shabbir et al. (2023) analyzed *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), finding Belle portrayed as skilled, intelligent, and independent, challenging traditional roles by rescuing her father and the Beast, reflecting her desire for fairness and justice. Her rejection of societal expectations, particularly regarding marriage, emphasized a woman's right to choose her destiny, advocating empowerment, education, and freedom from patriarchal control, reinforcing women's autonomy.

Denny (2011) noted gender stereotypes shaping traditional roles are conveyed in everyday life, literature, print, and electronic media, with children exposed early via fairy tales and animations, reinforcing empowerment ideas and gender inequality (as cited in Gull et al., 2023). Alkatiri and Titis Setyabudi (2024) explored gender roles in Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke*, set in Japan's Muromachi era, finding the film broke away from traditional stereotypes. Although Ashitaka is the main character, he is more passive, while female characters like San and Lady Eboshi are portrayed as strong, independent, and in control, challenging traditional ideas about gender in Asian culture.

Eissa et al. (2024) noted that despite global gender equality efforts, stereotypes and male privilege remain prevalent in film, with movies influencing audience perceptions of gender roles, shaping identities and beliefs. Analyzing Disney animations, they found stereotypes persist, potentially impacting viewers negatively, suggesting monitoring entertainment companies and media to prevent reinforcing stereotypes that shape audience perceptions.

Tamunomiegbam and Arinze (2024) examined changing gender roles in Africa, focusing on the shift from traditional roles to more diverse and transformative identities and relationships, finding constant tension between long-standing cultural values and new ideas about gender due to globalization, education, and activism challenging old norms and

creating space for new expressions. Despite positive changes, gender biases and inequalities remain, showing transformation is ongoing and incomplete. Dennis and Zolnikov (2023) explored how societies enforcing roles like “boys don’t cry” contribute to emotional suppression, impacting Black American men’s emotional development in adulthood, showing gender is not fixed but changes based on society, culture, and history.

In my view, the most significant insight from this body of work is recognizing children as active participants in learning, interpreting, and sometimes challenging gender roles, rather than passive recipients. This highlights the importance of examining children’s media, particularly animation, as a powerful site where gender roles are repeatedly constructed, negotiated, and normalized. Consequently, understanding gender roles as dynamic and socially produced is essential for analyzing how media influences children’s perceptions of masculinity and femininity within specific cultural contexts like Ghana.

### 2.7 The Evolution of Gender in African and Western Societies

Harber (2013) explains that gender roles have long influenced power structures in Western Judeo-Christian societies, with religious beliefs shaping social hierarchies. The Bible has been a key moral and ethical guide, reinforcing specific gender expectations that have shaped societal norms for centuries. However, as society and human knowledge progressed, strict religious doctrine often clashed with modern values, creating conflict between traditional gender roles and contemporary equality views. Key biblical texts like Genesis and I Corinthians played significant roles, supporting ideas like men’s dominance over women, men as breadwinners, women’s value linked to material wealth, and virginity’s importance. While some practices have faded, fundamental ideas still influence gender norms, especially in patriarchal societies. One central idea is women’s inferiority

to men, rooted in Genesis' creation story, used throughout history to justify gender-based hierarchies limiting women's social, economic, and political roles. Although modern society challenges these norms, their influence remains embedded in cultural and institutional structures (Harber,2013).

However, Kallio (2023) also suggested that as Western societies evolve, so do their ideologies, leading to progress towards greater equality and openness regarding gender norms and stereotypes. Chuku (2018) explored colonialism's effects on African societies, particularly gender relations and found that many African polities, like the Buganda kingdom, had gendered systems of checks and balances disrupted when colonial officials only engaged with male chiefs and authority figures. In the Dahomey kingdom, where women once held powerful political and military roles, colonial rule dismantled these opportunities. Some women resisted colonial conquest but were exiled, criminalized, or lost influence. Colonialism also impacted African women's economic contributions. Chuku (2018) also points out that African womanhood was historically associated with resilience and economic contributions, yet European colonial powers imposed new political, social, and economic systems altering African institutions and reshaping women's roles. Colonialism diminished women's status and leadership opportunities but also opened new advancement paths. Thus, colonial rule had complex effects, both marginalizing women and offering new opportunities.

In *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Oyewumi (1997) challenged applying Western gender concepts in African studies, arguing that gender as a strict male-female classification is a Western idea based on biological determinism, and not all cultures' view. Different African cultures, like the Igbo and

Kikuyu, have unique understandings not simply understood using Western frameworks. Oyewumi (1997) criticized Western gender theories' dominance in African research, noting many scholars applied frameworks from Western Europe, the United States, and Canada, imposing Western experiences instead of reflecting indigenous perspectives, risking African gender studies becoming an extension of Western thought. While gender is increasingly used as an analytical category in African studies, Oyewumi(1997) cautioned against applying Western frameworks without considering specific cultural contexts.

Oyewumi (2016) argued that gender is not just a social construct but also a historical one, shaped by societal norms and historical contexts. In Western societies, gender was traditionally understood through a binary framework placing men and women hierarchically, often privileging men and subordinating women, reinforcing belief in sexual dimorphism and fixed distinctions. Chuku (2018) suggested that European colonialism led to African women losing political and spiritual power, including roles in crowning or removing kings, a part of new constitutional and legal systems forced upon Africans.

Moagi and Mtombeni (2021) argued that in pre-colonial Southern Africa, women were not limited to domestic roles but held important positions in politics, religion, and economics, playing public roles as princesses, queen mothers, political advisors, and spiritual figures like prophets and rainmakers. Also, in pre-colonial West Africa, women were not confined to domestic duties but had diverse roles in political, social, religious, and economic spheres, actively shaping their societies (Amoah-Boampong & Agyeiwaa, 2021). Agbaje (2021) argued that while historians and feminist writers acknowledged complementary roles in pre-colonial Africa, colonialism profoundly changed structures, with colonial institutions

favouring men over women, leading to deliberate neglect of women with lasting effects contributing to current gender inequalities in Africa.

In my understanding, the persistence of gender inequality in contemporary African societies cannot be fully understood without acknowledging this colonial distortion of indigenous gender systems. Therefore, examining gender in both African and Western contexts requires moving beyond universal models to recognize how history, culture, and power intersect to shape gender relations. This perspective is essential for understanding current gender dynamics and for analyzing how media and globalization continue to mediate and renegotiate gender roles within African societies today.

### 2.8 Representation of Gender in Animations

Thompson and Zerbinos (1995) found gender representation in children's animation prominent, with male characters appearing more often, engaging in more activities, and speaking more than female characters. Both genders were portrayed stereotypically, but after 1980, animations shifted toward less stereotypical depictions, especially for female characters. Götz et al. (2008) observed children's television significantly shapes minds yet often fails to accurately reflect diverse realities. A critical analysis of international children's programming reveals concerning trends regarding gender representation, ethnic diversity, and stereotypical portrayals, with one striking issue being gender imbalance, male characters significantly outnumber female characters, with the gap widening in animations and animal-character programs.

Garabedian (2015) contended animation giants like Disney greatly influence society, including gender role definitions, and when children play, they imitate watched characters, reinforcing roles presented by likable protagonists, projected pictures, and popular

products. Gender roles have been argued to be products of social and psychological constructs rather than biological factors (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2016), and gender as a social construction is deeply rooted in history (Oyewumi, 2016). Ghilzai et al. (2017) argued 70% of observed children fantasized in real life, with animation content impacting how they learned moral and social ideals.

Findings across a wide body of studies suggest media targeted at children regularly depict characters according to stereotypical gender roles, and childhood is a particularly sensitive time in gender identity development (Aley & Hahn, 2020). Animations considerably influence behaviors of children who watch them, with rising influence on children's views and behaviours (Turkmen, 2021). According to Neira-Piñeiro et al. (2021), animations potentially shape socio-cognitive learning by providing social role models through stories, characters, and conflict resolutions, revealing that over time, female characters have gained prominence and increasingly represent women's empowerment examples.

But again, these animations convey numerous subtle, hidden messages, including gender biases and stereotypes, shaping children's perceptions and attitudes (Bedekar & Joshi, 2020; Wardaniningsih & Kasih, 2022). Animation giants like Disney produce animations not only for entertainment but also to deliver hidden messages (Wardaniningsih & Kasih, 2022), so portrayals in Disney films may play a role in children's gender socialization (Shawcroft et al., 2022). But animations have captivated viewers for almost a century, with hidden meanings impacting society greatly, even undermining cultural values (Karmakar & Bhadra, 2023). Gender forms children's opinions, behaviour, and experiences throughout childhood, and children become active agents in their gender development, shaping responses and reflections on received messages (Patterson & Vannoy, 2023).

Thus, in Ghana, where traditional cultural values intersect with modern influences, there is a pressing need to investigate how foreign animations cultivate gender roles in Ghanaian children. This is due to social globalization, the sharing of cultures and beliefs empowering the flow of ideas and information (Haini et al., 2024), disseminated through animations via television. According to Clarke et al. (2024), Disney continues depicting female protagonists stereotypically, potentially influencing young girls' behavioural development. Karbasi Amel and Sadeghian (2024) argued that in recent years, female characters have been created in ways helping children relate, especially when making tough choices during difficult times, and since these characters play big roles, they influence how children see themselves. Because children are the main audience, closely examining how realistic and appealing these characters are, especially in newer Disney movies, is important.

Hareket and Kartal (2024) analyzed 23 children's animations to explore the portrayal of children's rights and violations, finding films emphasize relationships, personal growth, and the right to dream, play, and grow up in a peaceful family. However, they also reinforced gender stereotypes, linking girls to housework and marriage while depicting boys as powerful villains. Some films depicted rights violations like neglect, abuse, and unstable family environments, with many young protagonists lacking families or experiencing negative parental influences like substance abuse, violence, or exploitation.

Jia (2025) explored the evolution of female characters in animation through gender narrative lens, finding that as global gender equality awareness grows, animations increasingly reflect changes in female representation. Comparing animations from different time periods and cultures revealed shifts in gender roles, character positioning, and personality traits.

In the Ghanaian setting, where indigenous cultural values intersect with global media flows, foreign animations may introduce gender norms both challenging and conflicting with local understandings of masculinity and femininity. In my view, this dual influence underscores the need for context-specific research centering children's perspectives and experiences. Therefore, examining how foreign animations cultivate gender roles among Ghanaian children is not only timely but essential for understanding media driven gender socialization in an era of globalization and cultural convergence.

### 2.9 Gender Socialization

Socialization shapes the decisions we make in life, including career choices. In Africa, boys and girls are raised differently, which strongly affects the jobs they consider. Cultural beliefs and expectations guide what careers are seen as suitable (Boafo-Arthur**,** (2023). According to According to Nickerson (2024), socialization is a lifelong process through which individuals learn social skills, values, beliefs, and behaviors needed to function effectively within society or specific social groups, shaping how people interact, develop a sense of self, and form social identity. Agents of socialization, people, groups, and institutions transmitting societal norms, values, and cultural practices include family, peer groups, schools, religious institutions, and media, significantly influencing individual development and worldview. Through engagement, individuals internalize norms and beliefs and learn to use material culture like everyday tools relevant to their surroundings, helping integrate into society and reinforce shared cultural understandings and social cohesion.

Gender socialization is the process by which children learn behaviours and roles associated with their sex, explained through several theories. Social learning theory emphasizes

reinforcement and modeling, where children learn gendered behaviours by observing same-sex adults, though research shows they often act in gender-typical ways even without reinforcement (Bandura, 1977; Stockard, 1999; Wharton, 2005, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011). Cognitive approaches, including Kohlberg's cognitive development theory and Bem's gender schema theory, highlight the child's active role, developing gender understanding as they grow and organizing information through gender schemas, often separated and androcentric (Bem, 1981; Martin & Ruble, 2004; Stockard, 1999; Wharton, 2005, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011). Psychoanalytic theory emphasizes unconscious processes, suggesting early identification with the mother shapes gender identity, with boys separating from the feminine and sometimes devaluing it (Chodorow, 1978; Stockard, 1999, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011). Research supports patterns like gender-segregated play, but evidence for other influences, like parental reinforcement, is mixed (Wharton, 2005, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011).

Gender socialization refers to the process through which individuals learn behaviours, values, norms, and roles society considers appropriate for their gender, involving transmission of gender stereotypes, commonly held beliefs about traits and behaviors associated with boys and girls. As primary socialization, it begins in early childhood through key agents like family, peer groups, schools, and mass media (Bhattacharjee, 2021, as cited in Deepa et al., 2025). It starts at birth, or even before, through parental and societal expectations, and continues throughout life as social institutions consistently reinforce gendered norms and roles (Kimmel, 2017, as cited in Deepa et al., 2025). Meier (2025) argues that gender socialization is the process through which individuals learn and

internalize socially prescribed norms and values associated with their sex, shaping attitudes, behaviours, and sense of self.

### 2.10 Agents of Gender Socialization

Gender socialization is shaped by parents, peers, and media. Parents are often considered the most significant agents, influencing children's gender understanding from infancy (Kretchmar, 2011). Early research showed parents describe male and female infants differently, applying stereotypes even with minimal physical differences (Rubin et al., 1974, as cited in Wharton, 2005, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011). Mothers tend to interact more with female infants, fathers engage in more physical play with sons (Clearfield & Nelson, 2006; Coltrane, 1998, as cited in Wharton, 2005, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011). However, meta-analyses indicate overall parental treatment has become less differentiated over time, except in areas like toy selection and play activities, where boys and girls are often encouraged toward traditional roles (Lytton & Romney, 1991, as cited in Wharton, 2005; Stockard, 1999; Wharton, 2005, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011). Boys face stronger criticism than girls for cross-gender play, particularly from fathers (Freeman, 2007, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011).

Peer groups also strongly influence gender socialization. Children prefer same-sex playmates from around age three, reinforcing gendered norms, roles, and behaviours, often more rigidly for boys than girls (Wharton, 2005, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011; Stockard, 1999, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011). Girls form intimate, cooperative friendships, whereas boys engage in larger, rougher play groups, contributing to ongoing gender segregation (Stockard, 1999, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011).

Beyond parents and peers, media including television, computer games, and literature plays a significant role communicating norms regarding gender-appropriate behavior. Studies indicate that although more recent children's books increasingly depict non-stereotypical roles, earlier publications reinforcing traditional norms remain widely accessible, often portraying girls in conventionally feminine activities like household chores and boys in a broader range of pursuits, with female characters frequently shown holding domestic items and male characters using outdoor tools or engaging in construction (Burn, 1996, as cited in Kretchmar, 2011).

## 2.11 Theoretical Framework

### 2.11.1 Gender Schema Theory (GST)

Gender Schema Theory, propounded by Bem (1981), combines ideas from cognitive developmental theory (children actively process gender information) and social learning theory (children learn gender roles from society). According to Bem (1981), Gender Schema Theory starts from the idea that children inevitably learn their society's cultural meanings of being female and male. And that, in most societies, these meanings include a wide and complex set of gender linked ideas. Some relate directly to men and women, such as biological differences, reproductive roles, division of labour, and personality traits. Others are more indirect or symbolic, such as linking softness or roundness with femininity and strength or angularity with masculinity. No other social distinction appears to organize human experience as extensively as the female and male divide. Beyond learning these gender related ideas, the theory argues that children also learn *how* to use them. Children learn to rely on gender linked associations to interpret, evaluate, and organize new information. In this way, they develop a gender schema, which is a cognitive framework

that shapes how they perceive the world. A schema guides attention by preparing the individual to notice and absorb information that fits within it. Gender-schematic thinking is therefore selective and helps individuals give structure and meaning to a large amount of information (Bem, 1981). Specifically, gender-schematic processing involves sorting traits, behaviours, and objects into masculine and feminine categories, even when other ways of categorizing them are possible. For example, qualities like “tender” may be grouped as feminine, while traits like “assertive” are grouped as masculine, regardless of their other characteristics. Perspective is then seen as an active process shaped by the interaction between new information and existing schemas (Bem, 198).

According to Bem (1981), sex typing develops partly because individuals apply the gender schema to their own self-concept. As children learn which traits are culturally linked to their sex, they also learn which qualities are considered relevant to themselves. This goes beyond simply learning that boys are expected to be strong and girls nurturing; it involves learning that certain traits are appropriate for one sex and largely irrelevant for the other. As a result, children selectively organize their self-concept around gender-appropriate traits, leading boys and girls to view themselves as fundamentally different. At the same time, children begin to evaluate themselves using gender standards. The gender schema becomes a guide for judging personal behaviour, preferences, and abilities, and self-esteem becomes tied to conformity with gender norms. This internal motivation encourages individuals to regulate their behaviour in ways that align with cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity, reinforcing sex-typed patterns over time.

Importantly, Gender Schema Theory focuses on process rather than content. It is not concerned with what specific traits are defined as masculine or feminine, but with the act of organizing the world and the self around gender categories (Bem, 1981).

GST's application spans various fields. Lim et al. (2021) explored gender differences in consumer engagement with branded apps, showing that gender moderates how individuals interact, with gendered cognitive schemas influencing continuous use intention in mobile commerce. Men and women respond differently to engagement factors like design, interactivity, and usability, supporting GST's premise that individuals process and categorize information based on gender schemas, affecting decision-making, but schemas are not static, suggesting GST could benefit from refinement for evolving digital consumer behaviour.

Ebadati and Ebadati (2022) extended GST by investigating its connection to adolescent social adjustment, highlighting gender schemas' role in helping adolescents navigate social environments, suggesting modifying or reinforcing schemas can significantly impact social outcomes, emphasizing the need for interventions challenging traditional roles to promote better social integration.

Rajalakshmy and Afrin (2024) addressed gender schemas' flexibility in understanding mental health disparities among young adults, arguing individuals develop personalized gender schemas transcending the traditional binary, providing a cognitive framework influencing how they perceive and express mental health issues. This expansion challenges GST's original formulation, offering a more dynamic view of gender as a spectrum, valuable for addressing disparities rooted in rigid societal expectations.

Yigit-Gencten et al. (2024) applied GST to analyze gender representation in children's literature, examining female character portrayals in picture books, finding significant gendered portrayals like absence of female characters, gendered language, and reinforcement of traditional maternal roles. Using GST illustrates literature's pivotal role in shaping children's gender schemas, arguing reinforcing traditional norms could perpetuate stereotypes, limiting cognitive flexibility, and suggesting gender-neutral, diverse representations are essential for promoting gender equality early.

Ogunbola et al. (2024) explored gender roles in Nollywood movies using GST alongside cultivation theory, finding films reinforce patriarchal norms but also feature strong female characters defying traditional roles, showing media's dual impact in shaping gender schemas. Using GST highlights how films as cultural products can perpetuate or challenge stereotypes, shaping audiences' cognitive frameworks, suggesting more strong female leads could encourage broader societal changes in patriarchal cultures.

Adil and Malik (2024) explored gender differences in parenting practices influencing children's gender views, finding that mothers are more involved in caregiving with positive strategies, and fathers take more traditional roles. This dynamic crucially shapes children's gender schemas, as parenting practices directly reinforce roles early. Integrating GST illustrates parental influence shapes expectations and highlights balanced parenting's importance for gender equity.

Mohammadi et al. (2025) examined how cultural and gender norms are transmitted to children through verbal and non-verbal gestures, shaping gender identity. Their ethnographic study, based on Mead's theory of Mind, Self, and Society, links gender schema development to family socialization, showing parents and caregivers pass down

cultural expectations forming the child's schema. Using GST underscores addressing gender norms early to prevent reinforcing harmful stereotypes and promote equity.

While GST initially focused on children's cognitive processing of gendered information, it now applies to consumer behaviour (Lim et al. (2021)), adolescent social adjustment (Ebadati & Ebadati, 2022), mental health (Rajalakshmy & Afrin, 2024)), media representations (Ogunbola et al.,2024), parenting practices (Adil and Malik,2024) and more. In my view, this evolution strengthens GST, highlighting its flexibility and relevance in a globalized, media-saturated world. Importantly, literature emphasizes cultural products like films, literature, and animations can critically shape and reinforce children's gender schemas during early developmental stages.

Gender Schema Theory explains that children actively develop mental frameworks about gender that shape how they understand and respond to media messages. These schemas influence how children interpret, remember, and evaluate gender roles in animations, rather than simply absorbing them. The theory also helps analyze animations by identifying themes associated with traditional, transitional, and egalitarian gender roles. Because gender schemas are learned and flexible, children can accept, question, or reinterpret media portrayals, making GST a useful framework for investigating how foreign animations cultivate gender role development among Ghanaian children.

# CHAPTER THREE

# METHODOLOGY

## 3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a complete explanation of the research methodology used in this study. It outlines the research approach, design, sampling strategy, sample size, a synopsis of the selected animation, data collection methods, methods of data analysis, and the ethical considerations related to the following research questions:

1. What are the various gender roles in the selected children's animation?
2. What are children's perspectives of the gender roles in the selected animation?
3. What are the socialization agents reflected in the gender roles in the selected children's animation and in the children's real-life experiences?

## 3.1 Research Approach

This study, which investigates how foreign animations cultivate gender roles in Ghanaian children, adopts a qualitative research approach. This approach allows for a deep understanding of the various gender roles presented in foreign animations, how these roles are linked to reflected socialization agents, and how children interpret these messages in the selected animation.

Tisdell et al. (2025) argue that many scholars have defined qualitative research in ways that reflect its complexity and flexibility. Scholars such as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describe it as a situated activity that places the researcher within the real world, using interpretive and practical methods to reveal how individuals make sense of their

experiences. They note that qualitative research allows scholars to study people and events in their natural settings and to interpret phenomena through the meanings individuals attach to them. This kind of research values the idea that people's beliefs and values affect how they understand the world, and it tries to answer questions about how social experiences are formed and what they mean to the people involved. Similarly, this study sought to examine the various gender roles in the selected children's animation, *Mufasa: The Lion King*, children's perspectives of these gender roles, and the socialization agents reflected in the identified gender roles and in the children's everyday experiences. The authors also note earlier scholars such as Van Manen's (1979) definition of qualitative research as an umbrella term for various interpretive techniques aimed at describing, decoding, and understanding the meanings of naturally occurring social phenomena (as cited in Tisdell et al., 2025). Moser and Korstjens (2017) also explored it as an investigation method that provides deeper insights into real-world issues (as cited in Usman et al., 2025). This means qualitative research provides deeper insights by engaging directly with how people think, feel, and act in specific contexts. In this study, children's exposure to foreign animation and their understanding of gender roles are naturally occurring processes influenced by their regular viewing habits and thought processes. Therefore, qualitative methods such as interviews and document analysis are well-suited for capturing the depth and diversity of these children's meaning-making processes.

Ponterotto (2006) asserts that qualitative research is about deeply exploring and understanding a situation, a group of people, or a setting in its context. Researchers attempt to understand what is happening by carefully observing and engaging with the people or environment involved. They focus on small details such as gestures, words, or behaviors

that may seem minor but help them understand larger meanings or patterns. The author further notes that being very observant and attentive is one of the most important skills needed for conducting good qualitative research. A similar claim is made by Creswell (2013), who suggests that qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. In alignment with the above observations, this approach is appropriate for this study because the research questions demand not just surface-level observation but detailed analysis of both the selected animations and the interpretive responses of the children. This approach enabled the exploration of the various gender roles presented in the selected animation, the children's perspective of these roles, and how these roles are linked to reflected socialization agents in both the animation content and their lived experiences,

Geertz (1983) introduced the idea of "thick description," a research process that goes beyond merely describing actions to understanding the deeper meanings behind them. Other scholars have identified "thick description" as a central concept in qualitative research, noting that almost every major textbook on qualitative methods written in the past thirty years has a section or entry about it (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Denzin, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 1990, as cited in Ponterotto, 2006). "Thick description" means providing a detailed and rich explanation of what is happening in a social setting, including not just what people are doing, but also the context, the meaning behind their actions, and how it all fits into a bigger picture. It helps the reader understand the deeper layers of a situation, including cultural meanings, emotions, and motivations (as cited in Ponterotto, 2006). Adding to the above observations, Alvesson (2023) also notes it as a major feature of

qualitative research, which allows the researcher to delve into materials for in-depth investigation and search for layers of meaning to gain insights that result in a deeper interpretation of the research findings. In the same regard, an understanding of "thick description" enabled the exploration and interpretation of the subtle ways gender roles were communicated through gestures, colours, dialogue patterns, character hierarchies, and emotional tones in the selected animation. This resulted in a deeper interpretation of the research findings. Also, this approach allowed for a detailed understanding of the various gender roles presented in the selected foreign animation, the children's perspective of these roles, and how these roles are linked to reflected socialization agents in the animation and in their lives. Through thick description, the research revealed the layers of meaning embedded in children's reactions, conversations, and play behaviours inspired by animated characters. Therefore, a qualitative approach is not just appropriate but essential for uncovering the deeper cultural meanings and social dynamics involved in how foreign animation cultivates gender roles among Ghanaian children.

Lindlof and Taylor (2017) suggest that qualitative research concentrates on the social behaviours and meanings of individuals within a particular historical or cultural setting. Given that these Ghanaian children's interpretations may be derived from the cultural intersection of Ghanaian values and global media influences, the qualitative method is ideal for studying their subjective understandings. Furthermore, this study is underpinned by the philosophical paradigm of social constructionism. This approach to qualitative research suggests that people seek to comprehend the world in which they exist and develop subjective meanings of their experiences. These subjective meanings are often rooted in social, cultural, and historical constructions; hence, through their interactions, people

derive subjective meanings from their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This worldview informs the research approach, emphasizing the need to seek the children's subjective meanings and interpretations of the gender roles in the selected animation, which may be shaped by their interactions within the Ghanaian context, where traditional values coexist with global media influences.

The study also adopted a flexible constructionist approach, which emphasizes inductive reasoning, the interpretation of complex social phenomena, and the exploration of subjective meanings (Creswell, 2013). This approach is well-suited for examining the varied and nuanced meanings Ghanaian children attach to gender roles as portrayed in the selected foreign animation. To ensure credibility and authenticity, the study incorporated self-reflexivity, a critical element in qualitative research. This involves the researcher acknowledging and critically examining their own background, values, and potential biases, recognizing how these may shape data interpretation. The researcher consciously reflected on their positionality to avoid allowing personal perspectives to distort the participants' voices (Ponterotto, 2006). In doing so, this study aimed to authentically capture the various gender roles in the selected children's animations, the children's perspectives on these gender roles, and the socialization agents reflected in the identified gender roles in the selected animations and in the everyday experiences of the children.

### 3.2 Research Design

A research design serves as a foundational blueprint that guides a study from the formulation of its research questions to the drawing of meaningful conclusions. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), research designs are specific frameworks within qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches that offer direction for the

procedures undertaken in a research study. In this study, which seeks to investigate how foreign animations cultivate gender roles in Ghanaian children, the research design ensured that each phase of the inquiry is methodologically coherent and strategically aligned with the research questions. Yin (2018) further emphasizes that every empirical study follows a logical sequence that connects data to the research questions and ultimately to the study's conclusions.

The research questions are exploratory and interpretive in nature, requiring a deep understanding of meanings, perspectives, and contextual influences rather than numerical measurement. A qualitative case study design was therefore appropriate, as it allows for an in-depth examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. The case study design facilitated the use of multiple data sources, specifically interviews with children and document analysis of the selected animation. This methodological triangulation enabled the study to establish a clear link between the media texts (gender representations in the animation), the children's interpretations of those representations, and the broader socialization processes influencing their perspectives. By drawing evidence from these complementary sources, the study was able to comprehensively address each research question and strengthen the credibility of the findings.

### 3.2.1 Case Study

A case study design was chosen for this research because it is best suited for answering "how" and "why" questions about contemporary events over which the researcher has little or no control. Case study research is especially relevant when a study aims to explain contemporary phenomena and when the research questions demand an extensive and in-depth description of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2018). This study sought to investigate

how foreign animations cultivate gender roles in Ghanaian children, a phenomenon that is actively unfolding in today's media landscape. The researcher did not produce the selected foreign animation and could not manipulate the children's exposure to it, but could only investigate and interpret its effects. A case study provided the ideal framework to explore these real-life processes in depth.

Similarly, Yin and Davis (2007) argue that a case study is a way of doing research where one closely studies a real-world situation (the "case") in detail while also looking at the real environment around it. This method is especially useful when it is hard to separate the situation from its surroundings. Simply put, one uses a case study when wanting to fully understand something happening in real life, knowing that the context is important to that understanding. This aligns with this study's research questions of understanding the various gender roles in the selected children's animation, what the children's perspectives of these gender roles are, and what socialization agents are reflected in the identified gender roles in the selected children's animations and in the children's everyday experiences. These questions require more than abstract theorizing. They call for an investigation of how children in Ghana experience and interpret gendered portrayals in foreign media, shaped by their meaning making process, cultures, and social influences. A case study allowed for this kind of holistic exploration, incorporating children's viewpoints from the selected animation and the socio-cultural background in which their perspectives are formed. Therefore, adopting a case study approach is justified as it allowed the researcher to explore the interconnectivity between the various gender roles presented in the selected animation, how these roles are linked to reflected socialization agents, and how children

interpreted these messages within the Ghanaian context, something that cannot be meaningfully separated from its surroundings.

Additionally, this study adopted a case study design because it enables an in-depth investigation of a contemporary and context-specific phenomenon: how foreign animations can cultivate gender roles among Ghanaian children. As Stake (2005) explains, a case study is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher investigates a program, event, activity, process, or individual(s) within a bounded system, defined by specific time and activity. In this research, the "bounded system" refers to the selected group of Ghanaian children, the specific foreign animation, and the interpretive process through which gender roles are understood. By focusing on a real-life, contemporary issue such as the ongoing process of children watching foreign animations over a period, the case study design allowed for the integration of multiple data sources, such as interviews and document analysis, which provided a rich and holistic understanding of how gender roles are constructed and internalized through media exposure.

This approach is particularly suitable for addressing the study's research questions, which sought to investigate the various gender roles in the selected children's animations, the children's perspectives of these gender roles, and the socialization agents reflected in the identified gender roles in the selected children's animations and in the everyday experiences of the children. Case study research, as described by Yin (2018), involves the use of multiple sources of evidence to enhance the credibility and depth of the findings. This process, known as triangulation, ensures that the data collected from different methods, such as interviews and document analysis, converge to support a consistent and well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon under study. By comparing and cross-

verifying information from various sources, the researcher can validate the emerging themes and interpretations, thereby increasing the trustworthiness and robustness of the study's conclusions. For this study, triangulation was achieved by combining document analysis of the selected foreign animation with interviews with the sampled Ghanaian children.

### 3.3 Sampling Strategy

In line with the nature of case study research, this study adopted purposeful sampling to select participants and materials relevant to the investigation. According to Patton (2002), a typical case study often focuses on a single bounded case, but sampling can also occur within the case to gather richer insights. Purposeful sampling is particularly effective because it enables the researcher to intentionally select individuals, documents, and artifacts that are information-rich and deeply connected to the phenomenon under study (Schoch, 2020). According to Creswell (2014), purposive sampling involves identifying participants who can offer valuable insights into the research topic. In Purposeful sampling, the primary aim is to identify individuals or cases that offer deep insights into the specific situation being studied, rather than aiming for representation of the general population. Sample sizes in case study research are typically small, which is a common characteristic of most qualitative research (Schoch, 2020).

Since this study aims to investigate and understand how foreign animation cultivates gender roles in Ghanaian children, it was important to select children who could make meaningful contributions to the study. The selected children shared similar characteristics, including being within the same age range of 9 to 12 years, which corresponds to middle childhood, a developmental stage in which children begin to think more critically about

their future (Maddox, 2024). All participants had been exposed to foreign animations for at least five years and had watched the selected animation at least four times before sampling. They took part in the study voluntarily with parental consent. The children were purposely selected from affluent households because such families are more likely to have reliable access to digital devices and the internet.

According to Twum et al. (2024), in Ghana, the high cost of internet services and digital devices limits access for many people, especially those from low-income households (as cited Omondi, 2020). As a result, socioeconomic differences increase the digital divide in urban areas, since higher-income households are more likely to own digital devices and have regular internet access (as cited in Agyemang, 2019). Educational differences also strengthen this divide, as only 61% of urban adults have completed primary education or higher (Ghana Statistical Service, 2020, as cited in Twum et al., 2024). By selecting children from affluent households in Communities 18, 19, and 20 of the Tema West Municipal Assembly (TWMA), this study reduced the effect of access-related inequalities and ensured that participants had continuous exposure to foreign animations across different platforms, making them suitable for examining how media influences children's perspectives of gender roles.

### 3.4 Sample Size

There has been considerable debate regarding the appropriate sample size for qualitative research. Most scholars argue that the concept of saturation is the most critical factor to consider when determining sample size (Mason, 2010, as cited in Dworkin, 2012). Saturation is commonly defined as the point at which further data collection fails to yield new or relevant information. As Charmaz (2006) explains, conceptual categories are

considered saturated when gathering new information no longer spurs new theoretical insights, nor shows new properties of core theoretical categories (as cited in Dworkin, 2012). While some experts in qualitative research avoid prescribing a fixed number of interviews deemed enough, there is considerable variability in the suggested minimum sample size. Many articles, book chapters, and books recommend anywhere between 5 and 50 participants as adequate, depending on the context. However, most discussions ultimately conclude with the reasonable assertion that "it depends."

Numerous factors influence sample size decisions, including the quality of data, the scope of the study, the nature of the research topic, the richness of information obtained from each participant, the use of shadowed data, and the qualitative method and study design employed (Morse, 2000, as cited in Dworkin, 2012). Yin (2018) suggests identifying potential case candidates by consulting knowledgeable individuals or by gathering limited documentation about them (as cited in Schoch, 2020). According to Charmaz (1990), in qualitative research, sample sizes are typically smaller than those used in quantitative studies because the primary focus is on gaining a deep, nuanced understanding of a phenomenon. Qualitative methods emphasize exploring the meanings, variations, and complexities behind the "how" and "why" of particular issues, processes, situations, subcultures, or social interactions (as cited in Dworkin, 2012).

Ritchie et al. (2003) also explain that this is due to the point of diminishing returns in qualitative sampling; beyond a certain stage, collecting more data does not necessarily lead to more meaningful information. In qualitative research, a single occurrence of a theme or code can be sufficient to warrant inclusion in the analysis framework, as the focus is on understanding underlying processes rather than quantifying frequency. Frequencies are

rarely emphasized because even one instance of data can offer significant insight into the phenomenon under study. This reflects the broader purpose of qualitative research, which seeks to explore meanings rather than to generate general hypotheses. Moreover, because qualitative analysis is highly labor intensive, working with large samples is often time consuming and impractical (Ritchie et al., 2003).

In alignment with all the above considerations, the sample size for this study was six children, comprising three girls and three boys, and one animation (*Mufasa: The Lion King*) picked from the first five top movies in the global box office. This selection was based on its popularity and high revenue in 2024, it has balanced representation of gender roles, and use of African elements like landscapes (Namib desert, Mount Kenya, and Lake Turkana) and languages (Swahili, Xhosa, Zulu). *Mufasa: The Lion King* brought in $335,226,293, proving that audiences remain invested in the legacy of Disney's *Lion King* saga (Zahed, 2024).

### 3.5 Synopsis of the Selected Animation

#### 3.5.1 Mufasa: The Lion King

*Mufasa: The Lion King* (2024), directed by Barry Jenkins, is a prequel to Disney's 2019 remake of the classic 1994 animated film. The story is narrated by Rafiki to Princess Kiara, Simba and Nala's daughter, and delves into the early life of Mufasa, exploring his origins and the events that shaped him into the future king of the Pride Lands. After Simba becomes King of the Pride Lands, he and his wife, Nala, have a daughter, Kiara, and are expecting another cub. They leave for the birthing ground, while Rafiki begins telling Kiara the story of her grandfather, Mufasa.

Young Mufasa is separated from his parents during a flood and meets Taka, a royal cub. Though accepted by Taka's mother, Queen Eshe, King Obasi does not want him around. Mufasa and Taka become close friends, even brothers, as Obasi tries to divide them. After Mufasa kills a white lion in self-defense, the Outsiders, led by Kiros, retaliate by killing Obasi, Eshe, and their tribe. Mufasa and Taka escape. They are joined by Sarabi, Zazu, and young Rafiki on a journey to Milele. Taka grows jealous of Mufasa because Sarabi does not return his affection, and he allies with the Outsiders (the white lions) to betray Mufasa and the group. At Milele, a battle erupts. Taka, who betrayed Mufasa, later saves him, earning a scar from Kiros. Rafiki causes an earthquake that defeats the Outsiders. Mufasa survives and forgives Taka but refuses to call him by his name. Taka renames himself "Scar." Crowned King of Milele, Mufasa reunites with his mother, Afia. Back in the present, Kiara embraces her legacy and prepares to pass the story on to her baby brother.

### 3.6 Data Collection Methods

In case study research, the research questions guide the type of data that needs to be collected. Based on these questions, the researcher decides what to ask in interviews, what to observe, which documents to review, and which artifacts to examine. As a result, case studies often use multiple sources of evidence, such as documents, archival records, interviews, observations, and physical objects (Yin, 2018). Stake (1995) also emphasizes that the research questions should direct everything the researcher does in the field, from gaining access to verifying information through different sources (as cited in Schoch, 2020). This study adopted interviews and document analysis as the data collection methods.

### 3.6.1 Interviews

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), the premise of interviewing lies in its capacity to allow participants to construct and express their understanding of experiences through language. Rather than simply collecting objective data, qualitative interviewing emphasizes the way participants articulate their thoughts, emotions, and social realities. Through this rhetorical construction, individuals provide rich, context-bound narratives that reveal how they interpret the world around them. This approach values the participant's point of view and recognizes that meaning-making is shaped by context, subjectivity, and emotion. In this study, which investigates how foreign animations cultivate gender roles in Ghanaian children, semi-structured interviews served as an essential method for uncovering children's unique and personal interpretations. As Charmaz (1990) explains, in-depth interviews are not focused on hypothesis testing or statistical generalization. Instead, they follow an inductive and emergent path, aiming to generate themes directly from participants' accounts and to explore the interrelationships among these themes through the lens of lived experience (as cited in Dworkin, 2012).

An interview guide was developed to align with the study's research questions, focusing on exploring the gender roles depicted in the selected children's animations, examining children's perceptions of these roles, and identifying the socialization agents reflected in both the animations and the children's everyday experiences. A semi structured interviews provided an appropriate and powerful tool for collecting these data. They offered a platform for children to share their viewpoints and their own understanding of the gender roles presented in the selected animation. Children reported not only what they saw but also the meanings they attached to the behaviours, traits, and roles portrayed. Interviewing

allowed the researcher to understand children's subjective perceptions and meaning-making processes, providing a rich, detailed account of how exposure to foreign animations shapes their understanding of gender roles. This approach aligns perfectly with the study's aim to capture the children's voices and the complexity of their experiences.

### 3.6.2 Document Analysis

Document analysis is a valuable qualitative research method used to uncover latent meanings embedded in texts and visual materials. It allows researchers to interpret subtle, underlying messages within documents, making it especially suitable for studies involving cultural and symbolic content (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Dayton and Holloway (2002) further explain that documents, whether written, printed, or audiovisual, consist of recorded words and images created independently of the researcher. In alignment with the above authors, the selected animation was not created by the researcher; therefore, using document analysis to search for latent meanings was most appropriate. By analyzing the audiovisual material, the study directly engaged with the following research questions: investigating the various gender roles in the selected children's animations, the children's perceptions of these gender roles, and the socialization agents reflected in the identified gender roles in the selected children's animations and in the everyday experiences of the children.

## 3.7 Data Collection Process

The data collection procedure for this study was guided by the research questions, as is expected in case study research (Yin, 2018). The primary aim was to investigate how foreign animations cultivate gender roles in Ghanaian children. Accordingly, data were

collected using semi-structured interviews with children and document analysis of the selected animation, *Mufasa: The Lion King*.

The study employed purposive sampling to select children aged between 9 and 12 years who had previously watched the selected foreign animation, *Mufasa: The Lion King*, at least four times. Before the interviews, permission was obtained from the parents of each participating child. The researcher gave each parent the interview guide to review and received consent from them. The researcher also used the opportunity to establish rapport with the children and informed them to watch the selected animation again.

### 3.7.1 Conducting the Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in the homes of the children, with their mothers present at home but not in the same space as the interviews. Each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. A flexible interview guide was developed based on the study's research questions, allowing room for follow-up questions and spontaneous responses. Interviews explored children's interpretations of the gender roles of the characters in the animation and the socialization agents associated with them. All interviews were audio-recorded with parental permission using a Techno Camon 17P phone and later transcribed verbatim. The researcher remained attentive, engaged, and ensured each child felt comfortable throughout the session.

### 3.7.2 Conducting Document Analysis

In addition to the interviews, document analysis was conducted on the selected foreign animation, *Mufasa: The Lion King*. The film was downloaded from Amazon Prime, a credible streaming platform, onto a pen drive and viewed by inserting the device into the USB port of a television. The researcher watched the animation several times to develop a

general understanding of the storyline, characters, and overall context. This was followed by repeated scene-by-scene viewing to achieve deeper familiarity with the narrative. Subsequently, the entire animation, including the songs, was transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. During the viewing process, gender roles were identified and grouped into themes reflecting traditional, transitional, and egalitarian ideologies. The transcript was read multiple times to ensure thorough familiarization with the data, with specific attention given to identifying the gender roles of each character and the associated socialization agents.

### 3.8 Method of Data Analysis – Thematic Analysis (TA)

This study adopted Thematic Analysis (TA) as the most appropriate method for analyzing both interview data and data from the selected animation. Some scholars note there are various forms of TA; this study adopts a version grounded in the qualitative paradigm, which allows for theoretical independence. This means the researcher is not bound to a single theoretical framework but can draw on multiple perspectives to interpret the data. This flexibility is particularly valuable in research that involves culture and media and requires nuanced and context-sensitive interpretation. Thematic Analysis emphasizes a reflective and iterative process of coding and theme development, allowing the researcher to remain open to emerging insights while applying critical thinking (Langdridge, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2012; Terry et al., 2017). These authors liken this process to sculpting, in which the researcher shapes the raw data through an interactive process informed by their skills, positionality, and interpretive lens.

In this way, TA is not simply a technical exercise but a creative and interpretive effort (Terry et al., 2017). Through TA, the study systematically uncovered recurring themes

across both datasets, allowing for a rich, layered understanding of how gender roles are portrayed and potentially cultivated by children. Riger and Sigurvinsdottir (2016) note that TA helps organize related ideas into meaningful categories, making it a foundational technique in qualitative research. Thematic Analysis provided the analytical depth, interpretive flexibility, and methodological rigour necessary to explore the processes through which foreign animations may influence gender role development among Ghanaian children.

The animation consisted of 32 scenes, which were analyzed on a scene-by-scene basis. After prolonged engagement with the data, each scene was coded using a structured coding instrument (Appendix A). The analysis examined themes related to character traits, dialogue, visual cues, and interactions that conveyed gendered expectations and socialization processes (Riger and Sigurvinsdottir,2016). The coding instrument was designed to categorize themes under traditional, transitional, and egalitarian frameworks, with particular attention to symbolic representations as well as stereotypical and non-stereotypical behaviours. Additionally, the coding instrument was used to categorize themes associated with socialization agents, including parents, peers, and mentors and their influence on gender development within the narrative and the children's lived experiences.

### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

In exploring how gender roles in foreign animations are cultivated by Ghanaian children, ethical considerations are central to protecting the rights of child participants and ensuring the overall integrity of the research process. Given the sensitivity of working with children and analyzing the media content they consume, the study was conducted in strict adherence to established ethical guidelines throughout all stages, from research design and data

collection to analysis and dissemination. According to Bowen (2009), researchers are expected to maintain a high level of objectivity and sensitivity during data selection, collection, and analysis to ensure the credibility and validity of their findings. This is especially vital in this study, which involves capturing children's perspectives and experiences, an area that requires extra care to avoid misrepresentation or bias. Research ethics reflect the core moral values of the academic community and are informed by broader societal norms and legal expectations. As the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (2019, as cited in Hasan et al., 2021) note, research ethics govern responsible conduct by ensuring that researchers uphold professional integrity. These principles are designed not only to guide academic rigor but also to protect the dignity, rights, and well-being of participants.

In this study, the protection of children's privacy and confidentiality was paramount. Participation was entirely voluntary, with informed consent obtained from parents or legal guardians and assent from the children themselves. To safeguard the well-being of participants, care was taken to avoid exposing them to emotionally distressing content or questions. All personal data was anonymized, and the collected information was used solely for academic purposes. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, strategies for rigour in qualitative research were adopted. Gunawan (2015) emphasizes the importance of techniques such as member checking, triangulation, systematic transcription, and careful coding to ensure reliability (as cited in Hasan et al., 2021). Similarly, Middleton (2021) distinguishes between reliability, that is, the consistency of research procedures, and validity, the accuracy of measuring what the study intends to measure (as cited in Hasan et al., 2021). These principles guided the entire research process. Knottnerus and Tugwell

(2018) argue that ethical conduct of all research activities, from participant selection to data interpretation, should contribute to fair and trustworthy outcomes (as cited in Hasan et al., 2021). Consequently, this study was transparent in reporting all findings. Altering or selectively reporting results to fit a hypothesis would not only undermine the study's validity but also constitute unethical conduct.

Moreover, ethical reflection was incorporated into the discussion of findings. Gregory (2003) suggests that researchers must present results truthfully and engage critically and respectfully with existing literature (as cited in Hasan et al., 2021). Therefore, the analysis presented an authentic interpretation of children's perceptions while positioning the findings within broader scholarly debates on media, gender, and cultural socialization. All data were handled confidentially and used only for their intended academic purpose. The researcher also maintained neutrality, ensuring that findings were based on actual data rather than personal beliefs or biases. This objective stance was crucial for producing balanced and reliable conclusions about how foreign animations can influence gender role formation among Ghanaian children. Finally, the research process was documented comprehensively to allow for external verification, critique, and replication by other scholars. This transparency enhances the academic credibility of the study and contributes meaningfully to the broader discourse on media influence and gender socialization.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

## 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of data derived from two main sources: the foreign animation *Mufasa: The Lion King* (2024) and interviews with six Ghanaian children aged 9-12. The chapter examines how gender roles are portrayed in the animation, how Ghanaian children interpret and understand these portrayals and the socialization agents in both the animation and in their lived experiences . The study is situated within the broader context of increasing exposure to foreign media in Ghana, alongside a decline in locally produced children's programs, which raises concerns about the cultural and social implications of such media consumption (Gerning, 2013; Osei-Hwere, 2008).

The chapter is guided by Gender Schema Theory (Bem,1981), which explains how children organize and internalize gender-related information into mental frameworks. Drawing on existing literature, themes associated with gender roles in the animation are classified as traditional, transitional, and egalitarian (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2016; Pinho & Gaunt, 2024).

The characters in *Mufasa: The Lion King* analyzed in this chapter are Simba, Pumbaa, Timon, Rafiki, Masego, Mufasa, Taka, Obasi, Kiros, and Chigaru (male characters), and Kiara, Afia, Eshe, and Sarabi (female characters).

### 4.1 Analysis of Data

### 4.1 Research Question 1: What are the various gender roles in the selected children's animation.

**Table 1: Gender Role Representation in *Mufasa: The Lion King***

| Character (Gender) | Primary Role | Gender Role Category |
|---|---|---|
| Mufasa (M) | Courageous Leader/Protector | Traditional / transitional |
| Simba (M) | Benevolent Authority | Traditional / Transitional |
| Obasi (M) | Flawed Patriarch | Traditional / Egalitarian |
| Taka/Scar (M) | Good Brother / Jealous brother | Transitional |
| Masego (M) | Good Father | Traditional |
| Rafiki (M) | Wise Elder/Spiritual Guide | Traditional /Transitional |
| Kiros (M) | Vengeful Ruler | Traditional |
| Zazu (M) | Loyal Attendant | Transitional |
| Timon & Pumbaa (M) | Comic Caregivers | Transitional |
| Eshe (F) | Hunter / Teacher /Mother | Egalitarian |
| Afia (F) | Mother | Traditional |
| Sarabi (F) | Independent Princess | Egalitarian/ traditional |
| Kiara (F) | Vulnerable Child | Transitional |
| Nala (F) | Mother | Traditional |

Source: Fieldwork data, 2025

### 4.1.1 Traditional Masculine roles

With regard to Simba, the opening scene reinforces traditional masculine ideals by portraying Simba, now king of the Pride Lands, as the embodiment of authority and leadership. He is also a warrior who fights against his enemies to protect his subjects as demonstrated in excerpt 1 ;

*Kiara: my dad told me he defeated Scar.*

The reference to the "Circle of Life" being carried on through a son reinforces the gendered expectation that leadership, heritage, and continuity are passed through male lines. This reflects a narrative that links masculinity to power, responsibility, and the public sphere as indicated in excerpt 2 and figure 3;

*Simba: This home we share is the fulfillment of my father's vision. How wonderful is it that Nala and I get to continue his dream and make even greater the circle of life.*

***Figure 3: Demonstration of Simba as the king of the pride land***

Pumbaa and Timon represent male characters entrusted with protective roles. They are assigned to protect Princess Kiara. Their status as security figures aligns with societal expectations in our society, where protection is associated with masculine duties or roles. Males are generally regarded as natural protectors and defenders and they readily respond to duty to serve as illustrated in excerpt 3;

*Pumbaa and Timon: Security detail reporting for duty*
*your Grace, your Highness.*
*Ruler of all four-legged creatures.*

Rafiki, the elderly and fearless mandrill, embodies traditional masculine wisdom through his role as a spiritual guide, healer, and custodian of ancestral knowledge. His character reflects the model of a wise man, a figure commonly respected in many Ghanaian traditional societies, where spiritual authority are usually assigned to men. Women may hold important spiritual roles (such as priestesses), but public recognition and leadership in communal spiritual journeys often rest with the male. Rafiki's character suggests that

masculine power extends beyond physical strength to spiritual and intellectual authority as illustrated in excerpt 4;

*Inaki:(referring to Rafiki) A child born with a leg that*
*does not work, yet somehow, he survived?*
*Unnamed baboon 1: it was Rafiki who found water in the dry season*
*Inaki: He speaks to the insects, converses with the moon.*

Rafiki further demonstrates his spiritual attunement by communing directly with nature, as evidenced when he negotiates passage with a fish: *"Instead, the fish has agreed to let us share the water"* (Excerpt 5).

Rafiki demonstrates supernatural insight by recognizing Mufasa as his "brother" through visions of Milele and automatically revealing Sarabi's dream about a "great king" referring to her father. This establishes him as a mediator of ancestral knowledge and deep spiritual bonds as illustrated in excerpt 6;

*Rafiki: I have been there many times in my dreams*
*My brother waits for me there. I've seen the tree.*
*Can picture it. The two of us, together again (looking at Mufasa).*
*Rafiki: (to Sarabi) Sometimes, a dream is all you have. …*
*Like the memory of a great king.*

Rafiki's spiritual authority is validated upon reaching Milele, where his prophetic visions materialize with Mufasa standing precisely where Rafiki had foreseen him at the sacred tree

This confirmation of his superior insight cements his role as a mediator between physical and spiritual realms as described in excerpt 7;

*Mufasa: Rafiki, this is the tree from your visions.*

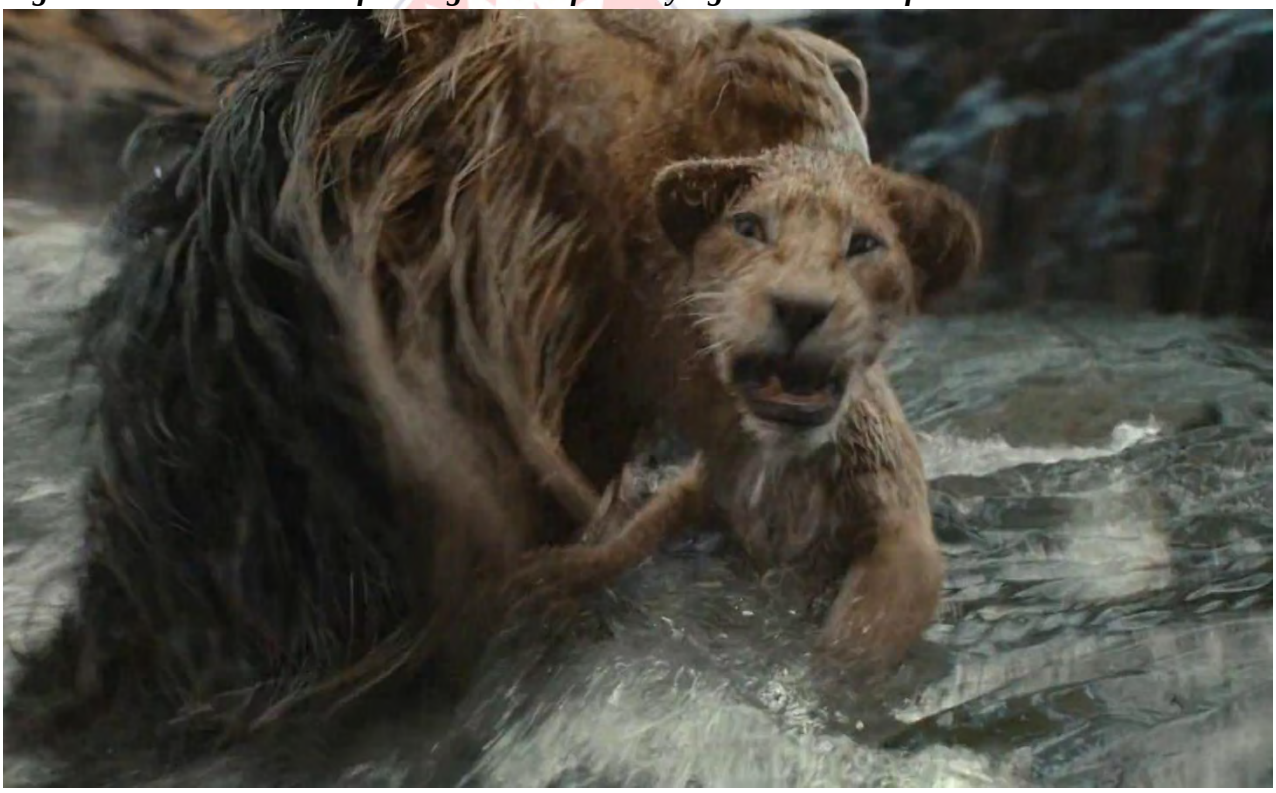
Rafiki embodies traditional masculine spirituality through his healing prowess, curing Inaki's past illness as illustrated in excerpt 8; *"Who healed you, Inaki when you were?"* and reviving Sarabi after a near-fatal stampede injury. His declaration *"She's alive"* (Excerpt 9 and figure 4) confirms his authority as a mediator of life and death.

***Figure 4: Demonstration of Rafiki reviving Sarabi***

Masego epitomizes traditional Ghanaian fatherhood as a visionary protector who prioritizes familial well-being by seeking greener pastures in Milele by telling Mufasa "*Imagine a kingdom full of life, water and food, grass and sky as far as the eye can see"* (Excerpt 10) and also

modeling self-sacrifice during crises, commanding Mufasa *"Mufasa, come back now, Mufasa stay there, l'm coming, son. Mufasa, the cliff is too high, but you can cross at the dam*." as he risks his life in the storm (Excerpt 11 and figure 5). His teachings reinforce patriarchal values of bravery obedience, and intergenerational responsibility.

***Figure 5: Demonstration of Masego in the flood trying to rescue Mufasa***



In his first encounter with rain and rising water, the young Mufasa does not retreat but continues to play in the dam. Even as a cub, before being separated from his parents, he

demonstrates bravery, overcomes fear, and takes initiative during the storm. These are traits traditionally encouraged and cultivated in Ghanaian boys as part of their socialization into masculinity. as demonstrated in excerpt 12;

*Mufasa:(talking to himself) come on Mufasa, you can do this.*

Mufasa's maturation from cub to leader exemplifies traditional masculine ideals such as courage,

endurance, and service ending in leadership. As an adult, he demonstrates decisive teamwork

during the journey to Milele, directing Zazu: "*Use your wings to cover our tracks... the outsiders*

*will follow them"* (Excerpt 13). Zazu's confirmation *"Well played, Mufasa"* validates his tactical insight, reinforcing patriarchal leadership models in Ghanaian contexts.

Mufasa's climactic battle against Kiros in Milele exemplifies traditional masculine dominance, where his boldness reinforces patriarchal expectations of male strength and authority in conflict. As the primary defender, his warrior role mirrors Ghanaian cultural norms that position men as protectors who must visibly show courage during crises as demonstrated in excerpt 14 and figure 6;

*Kiros: (Laughing) from this moment on, everything*

*the light touches belongs to me*

*Mufasa: you will have to take it*

***Figure 6: Demonstration of Mufasa in a fight with Kiros***

Young Taka displays positive masculine traits such as courage, loyalty, brotherhood, and affection for Mufasa because of his deep need for a fraternal bond described in excerpt 15;

*Taka: when I'm king, you'll always take my side…*

*I always wanted a brother just like you…*

Traditional societies encourage healthy competition among boys, a trait reflected in Taka's character as demonstrated in excerpt 16;

*Taka: Hey, Mufasa*

*Mufasa: yes, Taka*

*Taka: I'll race you to the other side*

As pride king and Taka's father, Obasi embodies patriarchal authority through stern control and staunch traditionalism. His resistance to outsiders mirrors Ghanaian societal values emphasizing male dominance, loyalty, secrecy, and control, as seen in Excerpt 17.

*Obasi: when we come upon an outsider, tell me what do we do?*

*... eat it… Taka, we do not associate with Outsiders,*

*the only true bond is blood.*

Obasi's declaration "*I must protect the bloodline, Eshe. The future of this pride. Taka, you are that future… I am sending you away"* (Excerpt 18) exemplifies the "Circle of Life's" patriarchal core, reflecting Ghanaian societal prioritization of male lineage.

In many Ghanaian societies, male tradition is preserved through patrilineal knowledge Transmission, a dynamic mirrored in Excerpt 19, where Obasi imparts values to Taka as part of this intergenerational male legacy.

*Obasi: no one can ever know you run.*

*That you ran from your mother.*

*It never happened Taka. Do you understand?*

*Taka: … I was just scared.*

*Obasi: It doesn't matter. We must protect the bloodline.*

*Taka: protect it with a lie? Father, that's deceitful.*

*Obasi: Deceit is a tool of a great king.*

*Taka, it's what Kings must do.*

Chigaru embodies traditional warrior masculinity showing physical strength, strategic intelligence, and duty reflecting male roles in conflict and surveillance. His loyalty and sacrificial service to Obasi mirror masculine responsibilities in Ghanaian traditions, as shown when he warns: "*They are coming this way, Obasi. Two lions for everyone of ours. Each one bigger than the next, but none as mighty as Kiros, their terrifying king"* (Excerpt 20).

Kiros embodies extreme authoritarian masculinity as the white lion's cruel king. His aggression toward his own subjects exemplified when he harshly punishes a lion for failing to protect his son. Excerpt 21 reflects a toxic patriarchal model where power is enforced through terror and brutality.

*Kiros: where is my son?*

*Unnamed white lion: There was a young lion,*

*majesty, he fought Shaju.*

*Kiros; And yet you came back. You survived.*

In addition, Kiros's disregard for established rules, his imposition of personal laws, and his displays of dominance illustrate the fearsome side of patriarchal leadership. While such traits may be admired in some traditional circles as signs of strength, they often result in authoritarianism and dictatorship, reinforcing the extremes of traditional male authority. This is demonstrated in Excerpt 22;

*Kiros: which one of you is King?*

*Obasi: you have no reason to challenge me.*

*Kiros: Does this look like a challenge, king?*

*Obasi: There are rules amongst lions.*

*Kiros: Not anymore, while you ruled this pride,*

*I've built my army. Yours is the last pride in*

*the valley which means everything the light*

*touches belongs to me. There will be one ruler, one lion king.*

Despite his small stature, Zazu (hornbill bird) represents protective masculinity through tactical intelligence and responsibility toward Princess Sarabi. This redefines male roles beyond physicality, aligning with Ghanaian values of resourceful guardianship described in Excerpts 23 and 24;

*Taka: Your king hired a bird to protect you?*

*Sarabi: How high can you fly?*

*Zazu: …his Majesty decided on the underling with wings.*

*And thus, I became the lead scout for the princess.*

*Sarabi: (referring to Zazu) Sometimes you need a bird's eye*

*view and I've got you to see me through by land by air.*

### 4.1.2 Traditional feminine role

Kiara, the young princess, is portrayed as emotional and reliant on male protection. Her vulnerability, particularly during the storm, reflects traditional notions of femininity in Ghanaian society, where girls are often socialized to be gentle, modest, and emotionally expressive. This portrayal is evident in Excerpt 25;

*Kiara: I'm scared. I want Mom and Dad…*

*my parents, there are gone… I'm not brave*

*like my dad. And l could never be like Mufasa.*

Kiara also demonstrates a traditional feminine gender role as a nurturing and caring sister to her

baby brother, illustrated in excerpt 26;

*Kiara: … hi there, I'm Kiara, I will take care of you,*

*forever.*

As Mufasa's mother, Afia personifies Ghanaian matriarchal duties such as an affectionate nurturer and cultural transmitter. Her teaching of Milele emphasizes women's traditional

responsibility for oral history and moral upbringing, aligning with societal gender expectations as demonstrated in excerpt 27;

*Afia: Mufasa, come see*

*Mufasa: Mom, what is that light way out there?*

*Afia: oh, that's very special. Beyond the horizon,*

*beyond the last cloud in the sky, that's a place*

*we call Milele… it means "forever"*

Eshe, Taka's mother, demonstrates compassion, caregiving, and moral strength. Her decision to save and nurture Mufasa even in defiance of tradition reflects the protective and empathetic qualities often attributed to Ghanaian women as demonstrated in excerpt 28 ,29 and 30;

*Eshe: what if Mufasa wins? If he wins, he lives,*

*Obasi. He stays with me.*

*Mufasa: Obasi will never accept me,*

*I will never be his blood, his family*

*Eshe: but you are my family…*

*Eshe: You have my love always Mufasa*

Princess Sarabi is portrayed as soft-spoken, beautiful, and modest, reinforcing traditional expectations of Ghanaian femininity that encourage women to be graceful, composed, and restrained as illustrated in excerpt 31;

*Mufasa: why are you following us?*

*Sarabi: (soft spoken) I was hoping to find my pride.*

### 4.1.3 Transitional Masculine Roles

Simba, as king of the Pride Lands, departs from traditional masculine expectations by openly showing vulnerability and affection. He refers to his subjects as "my friends," portraying a more inclusive and emotionally expressive leadership style. His affectionate relationship with his family, especially his support of his wife at the ceremonial birthing grounds, challenges the Ghanaian norm where men often do not partake directly in childbirth-related events. His conduct portrays a nurturing side of masculinity as described in excerpt 32 and figure 7;

*Simba: Nala, my love, I'm on my way.*

***Figure 7: Demonstration of Simba comforting Kiara***

Mufasa's fearful cries as a cub for his parents after being separated during a storm and his occasionally thinking about home reveal a moment of emotional fragility. This response can be seen as a departure from traditional masculine expectations in many Ghanaian societies, where male children are often socialized to suppress fear and be emotionally independent. Excerpt 33, 34 and figure 8 illustrates this deviation from conventional ideas of masculinity.

*Mufasa: Mom, Dad, can you hear me?*

*Is anyone out there? Mom Please, I'm scared.*

***Figure 8: Demonstration of Mufasa lost and scared in the river***

*Mufasa: (speaking emotionally) Sometimes I get a scent,*

*it's barely a trace on the wind, it smells like home,*

*then, it's gone.*

As an adult, Mufasa also departs from traditional masculine expectations by asking questions about emotions and openly expressing vulnerability and his willingness to explore his feelings challenges the cultural norm that men should remain stoic and emotionally reserved. This shift is illustrated in excerpt 35, 36 and 37;

*Mufasa: How do you know when you should follow a feeling?*

*Sarabi: Great thinking Mufasa (both rubbing their*

*heads on each other affectionately)*

*Mufasa: Ever since you appeared, I've been running*

*from something deep inside. And it's worse*

*than l feared. Cause I look in your eyes and*

*l can't hide. I push you away but the feelings*

*come back just twice as strong.*

With regards to the Masego character, he displays transitional traits by openly expressing affection by gently rubbing his head against his wife and son. He also demonstrates emotional intelligence by advising Mufasa to listen for his mother's voice during a storm, highlighting his respect for her insight even in a moment that calls for physical strength. In Ghanaian culture, men who seek guidance from women especially in the public space or high-stakes situations are often viewed as weak. Masego's openness and reliance on his wife's wisdom challenge this ideas. This is illustrated in excerpt 38;

*Masego: (speaking to Mufasa) Find your mother's voice…*

*Find your mother's voice…. Afia, he's there.*

Masego again departs from traditional expressions of masculinity by engaging in playful behaviour with his son. This lighthearted interaction contrasts with the strict demeanor often expected of fathers, especially within more traditional or patriarchal societies His playfulness frames fatherhood through warmth rather than dominance as illustrated in excerpt 39;

*Mufasa: dad, race you to the light*

*Masego: (laughing) you're too fast,*

*I've never beaten you. Nobody has ever beaten you.*

*Mufasa: I know*

*Masego: Mufasa, fastest cub in the world.*

Taka embodies transitional masculinity through his open admission of fear during crises and retreating from danger rather than defending his mother defies Ghanaian norms demanding male bravery and strength. His public emotional exposure contrasts with Obasi's insistence on secrecy, marking a transition toward emotionally integrated masculinity. This is demonstrated in excerpt 40;

*Obasi: no one can ever know you run, that you ran from your mother. It never happened. Taka, do you understand?*

*Taka:…. I was just scared.*

Rafiki blends traditional male wisdom with traits such as emotional support. He is relaxed, speaks in riddles, and comforts Kiara during the storm using storytelling, a nurturing role typically associated with women in Ghanaian traditional settings. His character illustrates that masculinity can include feminine traits such as warmth and nurture as demonstrated in excerpt 41 and figure 9;

*Rafiki: little one, there's no reason to cry (hugging Kiara).*

***Figure 9: Demonstration of Rafiki hugging Kiara to comfort her***

These characters of Pumbaa and Timon consistently show transitional traits. Their carefree and expressive personalities conflict with the traditional Ghanaian expectation that men should be serious, few of words and reserved as described in excerpt 42;

*Timon: one gentle reminder, we are not food.*

*Pumbaa: No, no, no, no, no. we are just two guys*

*walking to work through a pride of hungry lions.*

*Timon: which is perfectly normal. I'm not terrified….*

Obasi's persistent complaints and nagging behaviour over Eshe's and Taka's choices align more with traits stereotypically associated with femininity in the traditional Ghanaian society. This is illustrated in excerpt 43;

*Obasi: That one is not my son. This stray is forbidden*

*to be near the shade tree. Go back to the females*

*and stay away from my son (driving Mufasa away).*

*Oh, your mother, she adopts every lizard, speaks to*

*passing grasshoppers (complaining to Taka).*

Zazu's overly chatty and expressive personality also departs from traditional masculine norms in the Ghanaian society, where men are expected to speak less and only when necessary. His demeanor reflects a transitional masculine identity that allows emotional expressiveness and verbosity as demonstrated in excerpt 44;

*Zazu: okay, now that there's five of us, why don't we all go*
*around and say a fun fact about ourselves,*
*I'll go first. I once had a crush on a flamingo.*

*(whispering).I've never said that out loud. And*

*they're walking away. Yeah, places to go, kingdoms to see.*

*We're busy, let's hustle.*

### 4.1.4 Transitional feminine role

Afia displays non-traditional female traits by actively participating in a rescue mission during a storm. Guiding Mufasa with her voice while navigating danger aligns more with masculine protective roles than the passive support often expected of Ghanaian traditional mothers as described in excerpt 45;

*Afia:(to Mufasa) find your footing one step at a time….*

*I'm right here.*

Though soft-spoken and graceful, Sarabi also exhibits traits that depart from the traditional feminine role expectations. She is unafraid and embodies strength and independence and her ability to move undetected through the forest while monitoring Mufasa and Taka shows intelligence and independence. In the face of danger, she takes decisive action by releasing bees that cause a stampede, saving the group. As the only female in the group travelling to Milele, her proactive role and boldness in expressing opinions contrast with the Ghanaian traditional expectation that women should submit to male authority and remain quiet in decision-making processes as illustrated in excerpt 46;

Though soft-spoken and graceful, Sarabi defies Ghanaian feminine expectations through

independence and decisive leadership. Her forest surveillance and tactical use of

bees to trigger a life-saving stampede demonstrate agency typically reserved for men. This proactive role and boldness in expressing opinions contrast with the Ghanaian traditional expectation that confines women to passive roles as illustrated in excerpt 46 and 47;

*Taka: come with us, we can help you*

*Sarabi: I don't need any help*

Excerpt 47 shows Sarabi making a brave, independent choice. She acts alone without asking anyone, causing the elephant stampede. This decision ends up saving everyone's lives.

*Sarabi: Those bees saved our lives.*

*Mufasa: Because, uh, it felt like an elephant stampede.*

*Sarabi: We're alive, aren't we?*

By adopting a stray cub against tradition, supporting Mufasa publicly over her son, and demanding Obasi's fairness in front of the pride, Eshe subverts Ghanaian expectations of female obedience. Her actions exemplify a transition toward equal partnerships and female agency as demonstrated in excerpt 48;

*Eshe: Does he look like he's going to devour you? …*

*If he wins, he lives, Obasi. He stays with me.*

*Eshe: Run, Mufasa (then to Obasi) You did not have*

*to do that (because Obasi kicked Mufasa).*

### 4.1.5 Egalitarian Role

In Mufasa: The Lion King, egalitarian ideals are most notably represented through the dynamic between Obasi and Eshe. While the film retains some traditional traits for each character, which shifts towards transitional roles for some, it also challenges cultural expectations where male lions stay back and it is the female lions that go into the fields to hunt. Obasi and the other male lions in his and other prides do not participate in hunting. Instead, they rest while the lionesses fulfill the physically demanding role of hunting. This division of labour, where males stay behind and females take on the active, provider role challenges the patriarchal norm in Ghana, where men are typically seen as breadwinners and protectors outside the home. This dynamic promotes an egalitarian perspective, suggesting that leadership and domestic responsibility are not strictly gendered. These are demonstrated in except 49, 50 and 51 and figure 10;

*Obasi: I was trying to nap, Eshe. The all- important nap of kings.*

*Obasi: (taking to Taka) you want to be with the females?*

*You belong to the males…this will all be yours,*

*my son. You will be king, so pay attention.*

*Study every move I make.*

*Taka: Sleeping again.*

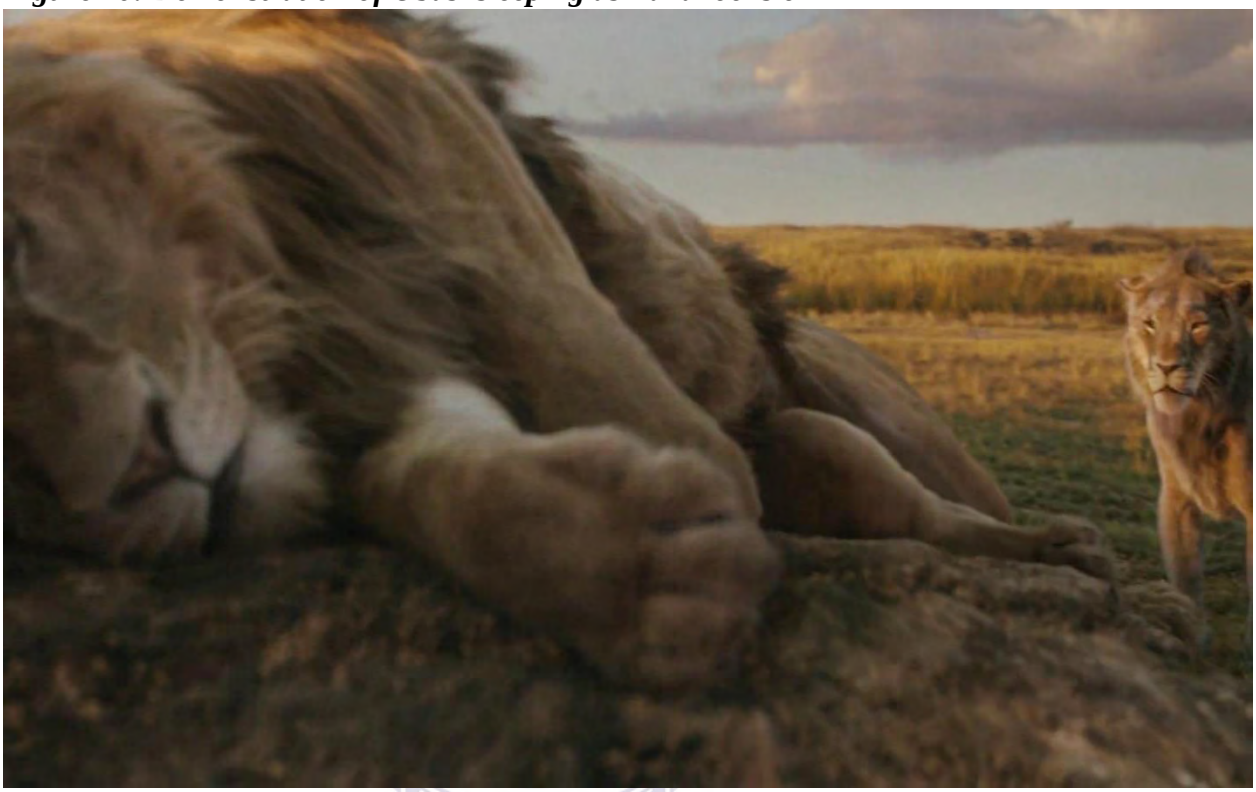
*Obasi: That is what males do. We protect the pride as we nap.*

*That's, well, that's power.*

*Kiros: you say you are king, but you lie around*

*in the shade. Out of shape…*

***Figure 10: Demonstration of Obasi sleeping as Taka looks on***





Eshe and the other lionesses are the hunters and providers for their pride. This role as a provider, reflects egalitarian role where women are empowered to take on responsibilities outside of the domestic sphere. Her mentorship of young lionesses, training them to hunt, defend themselves, and survive, further affirms her leadership and strength. In Ghanaian culture, this reversal is striking, because traditionally, women handle domestic and caregiving tasks with some transitional roles. This is demonstrated in excerpt 52 and 53 and figure 11;

*Eshe: close your eyes, and tell me what you hear.*

*What you feel.*

*Mufasa: there's a herd of antelope heading across*

*the dry lakebed. About half a day from here?*

*Eshe…very good*

*Taka: (speaking to Obasi about Mufasa) he gets to hunt with mother*

***Figure 11: Demonstration of Eshe teaching Mufasa how to hunt in the field***

Excerpt 54 also demonstrate that hunting is done by the lioness

*White lioness: (sniffing the air) Kiros, they are not alone*

*Another white lioness: (sniffing around) they have collected a lioness*

*Another white lioness: and a monkey*

From the data, the narrative mainly reinforces traditional gender schemas, especially by linking leadership, protection, and authority with masculinity. The idea of "The Lion King" is strongly patriarchal, as kingship is shown as a male inheritance passed from Mufasa to Simba. This reflects common patterns in children's media where male characters are more often placed in positions of power and leadership (Götz et al., 2008). Characters such as Mufasa and the adult Simba represent strong, responsible, and caring male leadership, while Kiros represents an aggressive and controlling form of masculinity.

Female characters such as Afia, and Eshe are associated with nurturing, caregiving, and emotional support. Although their roles are important, they often reflect "communal" traits traditionally linked to women, including home teaching and maternal sacrifice (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). This aligns with research showing that female characters in animation are frequently portrayed using stereotypical gender roles (Aley & Hahn, 2020; Bedekar & Joshi, 2020). However, the film also includes transitional portrayals that challenge rigid gender divisions. Gender Schema Theory recognises that schemas can change when children are exposed to new or contrasting representations (Rajalakshmy & Afrin, 2024). For example, Rafiki represents a form of masculinity based on wisdom, spirituality, and emotional care rather than physical strength. Timon and Pumbaa also present alternative masculine traits such as fearfulness, nurturance, and emotional expression. Similarly, Sarabi and Eshe display agency, courage, and skill. Sarabi's strategic use of bees and Eshe's role as the pride's main hunter and provider present femininity as competent,

independent, and intelligent. Even so, Azza (2022) argued that traditional gender stereotypes remain common, with media quietly supporting ideas like women leaders needing men's help, keeping men seen as more powerful. All the same, these portrayals challenge traditional gender expectations and support the idea of strong female characters in animation (Neira-Piñeiro et al., 2021; Ogunbola et al., 2024).

Most notably, the characters of Obasi and Eshe present an egalitarian challenge to traditional gender roles. While Obasi, the king, is portrayed as inactive, Eshe and the lionesses take on the role of providers. This reversal challenges common assumptions about male breadwinning and female domestic roles, suggesting that gender roles are socially constructed rather than fixed. Overall, the film presents competing gender schemas, highlighting the tension between traditional, transitional, and egalitarian gender ideologies (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2016; Pinho & Gaunt, 2024).

### 4.2 Research question 2: What are children's perspectives on the gender roles in the selected animation- Mufasa: The lion king?

This study examines how six children (9-12 years) interpret gendered roles in the selected animation, analyzing their perspectives of alignments and contrasts with masculine and feminine expectations in society. Below is demographic information on the children.

**Table 2: The demographic information of the 6 children interviewed**

| Child ID | Designated as | Age | Socioeconomic Background | Daily Screen Access | Location |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Girl 1 | G9 | 9 | Affluent | Yes | Community 19, Tema |
| Girl 2 | G11a | 11 | Affluent | Yes | Community 20, Tema |
| Girl 3 | G11b | 11 | Affluent | Yes | Community 20, Tema |
| Boy 1 | B10 | 10 | Affluent | Yes | Community 18, Tema |
| Boy 2 | B11 | 11 | Affluent | Yes | Community 18, Tema |
| Boy 3 | B12 | 12 | Affluent | Yes | Community 19, Tema |

Data from the interviews reveal nuanced perspectives on how male and female characters align and challenge societal expectations. Their views are analyzed below under different themes and grouped under the three gender roles: Traditional, transitional, and egalitarian, all supported by direct quotes.

**Table 3: Demonstration of children's perspectives on gender roles.**

| Role Types | Key Themes | Characters | Children's perspective |
|---|---|---|---|
| Traditional Masculine | Strength, leadership, bravery<br>Fearlessness and adventure<br>Revenge/ruthlessness | Mufasa, Simba, Kiros, Chigaru | Mufasa seen as a strong male protector and leader<br>Boys admired for exploring like Mufasa and Taka (cubs)<br>Revenge (Kiros)seen as real.<br>Boys discouraged from showing fear or weakness |
| Transitional Masculine | Vulnerability, fear, nurturing | Taka, Masego, Mufasa(cub), Rafiki, Pumbaa and Timon | One boy accepted fear as smart or practical, men should have few words. Men should not show fear. |
| Traditional Feminine | Nurturing, maternal care, graceful | Eshe, Afia, Kiara, Sarabi | Women praised for emotional support and sacrifice<br>Sarabi seen as graceful,<br>children found female hunters unrealistic |
| Transitional Feminine | Women in masculine roles (e.g., hunters) | Sarabi, Eshe | children supported women as trained warriors |
| Egalitarian | Lazy male stereotype<br>Shared responsibilities | Obasi, Eshe | Obasi reflected real male inactivity<br>Both genders should work and do chores equally<br>One boy believed physical labour suits men |

Source: Fieldwork data, 2025

The children's perspectives reveal both reinforcement and subversion of traditional gender roles. While bravery and nurturing were strongly gendered, most children advocated for flexibility in domestic/professional spheres, rejecting rigid divisions for instance, G9 noting "*Boys should cook too"* Notably, female characters with "masculine" traits like Sarabi's hunting skills were seen as aspirational exceptions, not norms. The animation both reinforces stereotypes (e.g., male bravery, female nurturing) and sparks critical dialogue about flexibility in gender roles, reflecting evolving perspectives among the children.

### 4.2.1 Traditional and transitional masculine perspectives

All the children observed characters having roles such as bravery, courage, authority, physical strength, and the expectation that males assume positions of power and must protect and provide for their families.

When asked about the similarities of the roles to what they observed in the society, the children widely associated male characters (Mufasa, Simba, Kiros, Taka) with societal expectations of boys and men in our society. G9 noted that "*When (Mufasa) grew, he became strong, he didn't fear anything... like when boys also grow up, they become strong*". B12 linked Kiros's relentless pursuit of revenge to the male behaviour of some men in the society stating that "*there are lots of revenge stories and it's understandable because he lost his son*." B10 noted that "*Mufasa hunted and hunting is like working so men also work".*

G11b saw Simba's kingship mirroring responsible male leadership and noted *that "He cared about his people, some chiefs in Ghana take care of their communities"*. "*Men are brave, they protect their families like Mufasa"* was the view of G11b. According to B12, *"boys are not afraid to explore like Mufasa and Taka as cubs exploring and playing in the fields*" and talking about Simba, he added " *as a leader or a king, if you have to go somewhere you have to announce it which proves authority*" , "*there is brotherly bond between them*" (Mufasa and Taka). However, when asked about any differences of the roles to what they observed in the society, 5 out of the 6 children noted that male vulnerability like fear is not usually accepted in the society. G11a observed that *"Men don't show fear because they feel they are strong and don't need support*". B10 argued that men in the society often lack protective instincts compared to Mufasa's father and stated that, "*most*

*men don't risk their lives for their children, they like to fight or drink".* B12 noted that *"Kiros was ruthless, some men seek revenge, but not to his extreme."*

Two out of six, also acknowledged that bravery is expected of boys, but it depends on the situation which is a shift towards transitional views. As B12 explained, "*Taka running from elephants was smart, you can't talk your way out of everything"* Similarly, B11 noted that *"Boys are adventurous and brave, but can be afraid too."*

### 4.2.2 Traditional and transitional Feminine perspective

These roles include nurturing, emotional support, teaching, and affection which are the dominant traits that children associate with female characters. These attributes reflect similarities between the female characters in the animation and the roles commonly observed among girls and women in society. Characters like Eshe (Taka's mother) and Afia (Mufasa's mother) were universally seen as embodying real-world maternal care. Gracefulness is linked to Sarabi. G9 praised Eshe *"I like how she took care of Mufasa... women in our society are like that."* G11a noted Afia's selflessness and stated that "*Mothers risk their lives to save their children*." B12 highlighted Eshe's intuition and argued that "*She knew Taka intentionally lost the race, mothers have a strong bond with children*". And also "*Eshe taught Mufasa survival skills, mothers guide their children".*

With regards to any observed differences, Three out of six children identified notable differences between the female characters in the animation and the roles traditionally associated with women in their society. These differences were especially evident in the depiction of "unfeminine" skills such as hunting and sole provision. As G9 observed, *"Sarabi has hunting skills, girls in our society don't do that. Princesses are prim and proper*." Similarly, G11a remarked, "*Our women aren't hunters. Eshe providing alone*

*while Obasi slept isn't normal."* B11 noted that "*even when she expresses strong opinions, she is too calm."* referring to Sarabi

Three out of six children expressed transitional perspectives, acknowledging cultural shifts in traditional nurturing roles. While they recognized the enduring association of nurturing with femininity, they also admitted that women could take on assertive or even combative roles when adequately trained or positioned. According to B12, "*Sarabi was calm but arrogant, some girls are like that, but not most"* and G11b also noted that "*women nurture, but they can also be soldiers if trained*".B11 observed Sarabi and noted "*a princess that can also hunt"*

### 4.2.3 Egalitarian perspective

This category explores the breakdown of traditional gender divisions in labour, focusing on who provides, who nurtures, and who participates in roles or professions traditionally deemed masculine or feminine. It reflects children's recognition of shared responsibilities between males and females in caregiving, household tasks, leadership, and protection, suggesting a shift toward more balanced and inclusive gender role expectations.

Obasi's laziness (sleeping while females hunted) was cited as reflecting similarities in the society. B1O noted "*men sleep while women work, like Obasi*.". B11 also noted "*some chiefs don't work, just like Obasi".* Citing difference from what they observed in the society, 5 children challenged rigid divisions. G9 insisted "*Both parents should work" and that "men shouldn't sleep while women suffer in the kitchen*." G11b advocated for shared chores by stating that "*cleaning shouldn't be only for women."* But B12, felt some roles (e.g., heavy lifting) suited men better due to physicality and domestic chores suits women better.

The interview data show that children are active interpreters of media content. They rely on existing gender schemas, shaped by their Ghanaian social context, to understand, access, and sometimes question the messages presented in the film. This supports the core principle of Gender Schema Theory (GST), which argues that children actively process gender-related information rather than absorbing it passively (Bem, 1981).

Children easily identified and accepted portrayals that aligned with familiar gender expectations. For instance, Mufasa's strength and Simba's leadership were linked to real-life expectations of masculinity, as reflected in comments such as, "When Mufasa grew, he became strong… like when boys also grow up, they become strong" (G9). In the same way, characters such as Eshe and Afia were praised for their nurturing roles, which children associated with motherhood and caregiving in their own society. These responses show how children use existing schemas to interpret new information, a key process in GST where media content is filtered through established gender categories. This finding also aligns with research showing that children actively construct meaning from media texts (Türkmen, 2021) and that media contribute to shaping perceptions of social norms (Garabedian, 2015).

Children also showed evidence of cognitive negotiation when encountering portrayals that challenged traditional gender expectations. Characters who displayed schema-inconsistent traits were often evaluated against local cultural norms. For example, Sarabi's hunting ability was viewed by some children as unrealistic, with one noting that "girls in our society don't do that" and describing princesses as expected to be "prim and proper" (G9). This response illustrates how children sometimes reject unfamiliar portrayals by labelling them as fictional. However, other children demonstrated greater flexibility. One child

acknowledged that although women are commonly seen as nurturers, they can also become soldiers if trained (B12), showing an ability to expand existing gender categories. This supports studies suggesting that gender schemas are adaptable and can change with exposure to diverse representations (Ebadati & Ebadati, 2022; Yigit-Gencten et al., 2024).

Further evidence of active schema evaluation emerged in children's responses to Obasi and Eshe. Obasi's laziness was recognized as a negative but familiar male stereotype, while Eshe's role as a provider was used as a reference point for advocating for more equal gender roles. Some children argued that both parents should work and that household chores should not be assigned based on gender (G9; G11b). Rather than accepting the film's messages uncritically, children used them to compare, reflect, and express their own views on gender. This confirms that children are active participants in their gender development, engaging thoughtfully with media representations and using them to reflect on real-life gender relations (Patterson & Vannoy, 2023). This also supports GST that children learn to rely on gender linked associations to interpret, evaluate, and organize new information. In this way, they develop a gender schema that shapes how they perceive the world (Bem, 1981).

### 4.3 Research Question 3: What are the socialization agents reflected in the gender roles in the selected children's animations and in the children's real-life experiences?

Gender socialization is the process by which individuals learn and internalize the norms, values, and expectations that society associates with each sex. This process shapes their attitudes, behaviors, and overall sense of identity (Meier, 2025).

**Table 4: Demonstrating Socialization Agents and their influence on Gender roles**

| Socialization Agent | Character(s) Influenced | Influential themes | Gender Role Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|
| Parents | Simba, Mufasa, Taka, Kiara | Teaching, behavioural modeling | Transmission of traditional kingship, transitional emotionality, or flawed entitlement based on parental model. |
| Peers | Mufasa & Taka, Pumbaa & Timon | Skill-sharing, companionship, competition. | Development of practical skills, emotional bonds, and competitive/comparative self-concept. |
| Education/Mentors | Rafiki (for Kiara), Eshe (for Mufasa) | Guidance, teaching | Cultural knowledge transfer and hunting/survival skills acquisition. |
| Societal Structure | All pride members | Enforcing norms | Internalization of pride-specific gender schemas (e.g., hunting as a female role). |

**4.3.1 The socialization agents reflected in the identified gender roles in the animation**

The socialization agents in Mufasa: The lion king, are mainly the family of characters and peer group and society. In Simba's life, the primary agent of socialization can be said to be his parents, Mufasa and Sarabi. As a traditional king and father figure, Mufasa plays a central role in shaping Simba's understanding of leadership, responsibility, and cultural values. He introduces Simba to the concept of the "Circle of Life", an important phase in manhood and chieftaincy traditions, where men are seen as symbols of continuity. In such cultural settings, the birth of a male child is often highly valued as it ensures the continuation of the family lineage and leadership. His transitional and traditional traits can be attributed to his father and mother, respectively. His father's teachings, behaviour, and

public role socialize Simba into a specific model of masculinity, and his ability to show vulnerability may be seen as a result of the affectionate environment he grew up in as demonstrated in excerpt 2 and in figure 12.

***Figure 12: Demonstration of Simba's parent (Mufasa and Sarabi) displaying affection***

Mufasa's development of both traditional and transitional gender roles can be traced to key socialization agents in his life: his parents, Masego and Afia; his brother, Taka; and Eshe. His parents instilled in him a vision for a better future in Milele (Excerpt 10) and modelled affection through their affectionate relationship. They also encouraged bravery and resilience (Excerpt 12). Taka contributed to his emotional growth by demonstrating sibling love (Excerpt 15). Eshe played a nurturing role, continuing to provide emotional support (Excerpts 28, 29, and 30), while also equipping him with essential survival skills such as hunting, scent detection, and environmental awareness (Excerpts 52 and 53). Furthermore, Excerpt 54 and Figure 13 reinforce the role his parents played in shaping his ideology.

*Afia: that's a place we call Milele*

*Mufasa: Milele? … will we ever go there?*

*Afia: oh yes, Mufasa. That's exactly where we're headed.*

Their arrival at Milele is shown in excerpt 55;

*Rafiki: Mufasa, do you see?*

*Sarabi: I don't believe it.*

*Mufasa: the other side of the light.*

*Sarabi: home*

*Rafiki: Milele.*

***Figure 13: Demonstration of affection displayed by Mufasa's parent (Masego and Afia).***

Unlike Mufasa, who remains traumatized by water after losing his parents in a storm, Taka shows no fear. Taka's presence and teaching gradually helps Mufasa overcome this phobia, as seen in Excerpt 56 where Taka give Mufasa some techniques on how to swim when they first met and crocodiles were about to devour him. Furthermore, the water navigation skills Mufasa learns through his socialization with Taka enable his crucial upward swim after the water fight against Kiros as demonstrated in figure 14.

*Taka: Swim*

*Mufasa: But l can't*

*Taka: you have to swim*

*Mufasa: I don't know how*

*Taka: All right, chin up then walk under water really fast.*

***Figure 14: A demonstration of Mufasa swimming out of the water***

Kiara's primary socialization agents are her parents (Excerpt 25) and Rafiki, who serves a grandfatherly role (Excerpt 41). Significantly, Simba's friends Pumbaa and Timon function as nurturing uncle figures. When Simba and Nala travel, they care for Kiara, even comforting her during a storm by telling family stories. Her mother's nurturing and the demonstration of emotional support and care by male figures represent transitional gender roles that likely contributed to Kiara's own gender role development. The depth of these bonds is shown in Simba's friendship (Excerpt 57) and Kiara's connection with Pumbaa and Timon is illustrated in

excerpt 58;

*Simba: I need you to stay with Kiara until l get back…*

*guys, I promised her that it would be okay…*

*I need you too to act like adults…Don't scare Kiara,*

*and most of all, no stories… I know where your head goes,*

*I grew up with you two. Promise me.*

*Pumbaa: Fine, no stories…*

*Pumbaa: okay, we have prepared a story,*

*Scare looked at us, he knew it was the*

*end of the line. I could smell the fear.*

*Kiara: so, you two defeated Scare and then you eat him?*

*Timon: honestly, one of the best meals I ever had….*

Thunder striking

*Kiara: I'm scared, I want mom and dad.*

Excerpt 59 reflects Kiara's relationship with her parents.

*Kiara: Dad*

*Simba: Hey, little one*

*Kiara: Dad, the storm is coming and I'm scared.*

*I want to go with you and mom.*

*Simba: Don't be scared my love,*

*Timon and Pumba will watch you while I'm gone.*

*Be brave now Kiara, be brave.*

Taka's gender role formation is primarily shaped by his parents (Obasi and Eshe) and Mufasa,

with his father Obasi being most influential. Obasi's passivity (e.g., napping instead of teaching)

left Taka lacking survival skills, evident when he hid during his mother's attack while Mufasa

intervened (Excerpt 40). Taka also learned deceit from Obasi (Excerpt 19) and developed a

strong entitlement from Obasi's promise of kingship (Excerpt 50). This indoctrination led Taka

to cling to royal status despite losing his pride, resent Sarabi's rejection, and ultimately betray

Mufasa to their enemies as demonstrating in excerpt 60;

*Kiros: thanks to your brother. He left a trail of scars*

*for us to follow. He made a deal to save himself,*

*gave us this kingdom.*

*Mufasa: tell me he's lying. Taka please.*

*Taka: I'm the son of a king. But Sarabi chose you,*

*just like mother, just like my own father.*

*I saved you and you betrayed me…. You stole my destiny.*

Ultimately, when Kiros overpowers Mufasa during the Milele water battle, Taka recalls their brotherly bond (Excerpt 15). recalling his mother's advice on courage, (Excerpt 61 and 62), he helps Mufasa in the fight and assist him from the water after he has defeated Kiros.

*Eshe: Taka, Taka, your moment of courage will come.*

*Taka: (to Kiros) please, don't kill him.*

Mufasa serves as a contrasting role model of a male lion in Taka's life. If Mufasa was not learning to hunt, perhaps, Taka would not have been interested in hunting as well. He yearned to learn hunting because Mufasa was learning it because he observed traits such as strength and courage in Mufasa, especially in moments when Mufasa protects his mother and earns the respect of his father and with Sarabi in the elephant stampede as demonstrated in excerpt 63;

*Taka: I want to go with him (referring to Mufasa)*

*Obasi: you want to be with the females? you*

*belong with the males*

The socialization agents associated to the gender roles formation of Sarabi can be attributed to her parents even though they were not featured physically in the film. both the traditional gender role (excerpt 31) reveal that as a princess, she is socialized to be graceful but also departs from that into a transitional gender role (excerpt 47) formation by exhibiting hunting skills which she probably acquired from her mother or the female lions in her pride as illustrated in excerpt 64;

*Mufasa: No, they're moving through the bush willow…*

*clear your thoughts, concentrate.*

*Sarabi: I am concentrating (with her head raised up).*

*he is right. We have to go down.*

Lastly, Pumbaa and Timon serve as each other's agents of socialization. Despite being different species, Pumbaa a warthog and Timon a meerkat, their carefree and comedic personalities exemplify how close friends can influence one another through shared experiences. Their interactions reflect how peers can 'rub off' on each other, adopting similar attitudes and behaviours over time. While they occasionally challenge each other's perspectives, their complementary traits strengthen their bond. This dynamic illustrates how peer groups function as significant agents of socialization, as demonstrated in Excerpt 65;

*Pumbaa: okay, you know what, you know what,*

*you know what, fine no stories*

*Timon: speak for yourself Pumbaa*

*Pumbaa: (whispering) No pssh, we will tell a story anyway*

*Timon: (whispering) we'll tell him that we're not gonna…*

*Mufasa: The Lion King* (2024) provides a useful narrative for examining how gender roles are communicated and learned through key agents of socialization. The film reflects the core ideas of Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) by showing how children represented symbolically by young cubs develop gendered expectations through observation, guidance, and reinforcement within their social environment.

Within the film, the main agents of socialization are the family, peer, and mentor figures. Each of these agents contributes to the formation of gender schemas, which Bem (1981) describes as mental structures that help individuals understand and organize ideas about masculinity and femininity.

### 4.3.2 The socialization agents reflected in the children's real-life experiences.

**Table 5: Demonstrating socialization agents reflected in the children's real-life experiences**

| Socialization Agents | Advocated gender roles | Influential themes | Examples from children |
|---|---|---|---|
| Family | **Egalitarian/Flexible** | behavioral modeling, empowerment | "My parents don't tell me some roles are for boys or girls." (G9); Father doing chores (G11b). |
| School | **Mix -Traditional and Egalitarian** | Official egalitarian rhetoric, unofficial traditional practices | "Teachers do not say "soldier is for men" (B10) vs. "Girls sweep more" (B12). |
| Peers | **Traditional** | Social policing, reinforcement of stereotypical roles. | *"One girl said no to boys joining ampe."*(G9); "*pink is for girls"*(B10). |
| Media | Predominantly Traditional (with exceptions) | Cultivation through repetitive storytelling, provision of aspirational role models. | *"I want to be a princess"*(G9); "*I am inspired by Kiros perseverance."* (B12). |

Source: Fieldwork data, 2025

#### 4.3.2.1 Family

Families emerge as one of the strongest and most consistent agents of socialization promoting gender flexibility. All six children referenced some form of non-traditional or egalitarian message from home. For instance, G9 stated that "*my parents don't tell me some roles are for boys or girls,"* demonstrating a deliberate effort by them to avoid imposing gender boundaries. G11a similarly reported, "*My parents feel I can be anything regardless of my gender*," which reflects parental support for non-traditional aspirations. Beyond ideological support, families also model inclusive behaviours. B12's parents even promoted nursing often considered a "female" profession to his male cousin, emphasizing

interest over gender. G11b's expressed her experience at home where her father assists with household chores, and her sister advocates for equality, stating that *"everyone should have same role."* These familial influences collectively point to a growing acceptance of gender-neutral roles at home.

#### 4.3.2.2 Education/ Mentorship Systems

The school environment provided a more mixed picture. Several children, including G9, G11a, and B10, stated that their teachers avoid reinforcing gendered language or role expectations. G9 reported, *"Teachers don't say some roles are for boys or girls,"* and B10 recalled that "*teachers don't say 'soldier is for men,*" indicating an institutional push for equality. G11a affirmed this by saying, "*Teachers don't say professions are male or female."* However, this progressive messaging is occasionally undermined by contradictory practices. B12 noted that while teachers promote equal opportunity in principle, classroom chores reflect traditional gender divisions: "Girls sweep more; boys avoid chores." This contradiction can confuse children, undermining verbal messages of equality with observed behaviour that still upholds traditional norms.

#### 4.3.2.3 Peers

Peers were commonly identified as upholding more rigid gender roles. All children cited peer behaviours that reinforce traditional expectations. G9 mentioned, "*One girl said no to boys joining ampe,"* a game culturally coded as feminine. G11a described peers assigning physical tasks based on gender: *"Girls call boys to carry chairs."* B10 recounted a friend's comment that *"pink is for girls"* after he wore a pink shirt. B11 mentioned that "*The boys in my class don't want to sweep"* These examples show that, despite egalitarian messages at home or school, peer groups often act as strong enforcers of traditional gender norms.

Even G11b and B12, who were otherwise exposed to progressive family environments, encountered peers who insisted that "*some roles are for boys, some for girls."* while families and schools may strive to redefine roles, peer reinforcement can slow or counteract this progress, especially in informal or social settings.

#### 4.3.2.4 Media Influence

The media appeared both as a source of reinforcement for traditional gender ideals and as a tool for inspiration. For G9, exposure to princess narratives shaped aspirations: *"I want to be a princess*," illustrating how media can reinforce narrow, gendered fantasies. B11 viewed Mufasa as a moral leader, comparing him to President Mahama and highlighting media's role in shaping leadership ideals: "*He lives by his promises."* This shows that media can convey both stereotypical and aspirational gender models depending on the character and storyline. Meanwhile, G11a admired Eshe for being nurturing but also skilled at hunting, blending feminine and masculine traits. B10 simply stated, *"I like animations a lot,"* which may suggest frequent exposure to visual storytelling that influences his understanding of roles. G11b's preference for hero characters also implies a gravitation toward traditionally masculine-coded traits like bravery and leadership. B12 cited "*I am inspired by Kiros perseverance, never giving up on his goal*".

Socialization plays a central role in shaping decision-making in all areas of life, including career aspirations. In the African context, gendered socialization continues to strongly influence the choices and ambitions of young people. Cultural beliefs, expectations, and everyday practices guide individuals to pursue roles considered appropriate for their gender (Boafo-Arthur, 2023).

In the film, family members, mentors and peer play a central role in transmitting gender schemas. Kiara's nurturing nature is shaped, first and foremost by parental influence, while Taka's behaviour reflects the values taught by his own father. At the same time, Eshe's role as a mentor challenges traditional gender boundaries by socializing Mufasa into skills often coded as masculine. For example, in terms of peer influence, Mufasa exposes Taka to hunting and survival skills during their journey, while Taka, in turn, teaches Mufasa how to swim. This reflects how key socialization agents transmit societal norms while also allowing space for alternative gender models (Nickerson, 2024).

In Ghana, these gender norms are deeply embedded across children's social environments and shape their identities from an early age (Nartey et al., 2023). The home, as the primary microsystem, is often the first place where children learn what behaviours, responsibilities, and goals are considered suitable for girls and boys.

From the data, the socialization of gender roles among these children is deeply nuanced, shaped by the intersection of multiple agents. In the children's real lives, family emerged as the most consistent promoter of flexible and egalitarian gender schemas. Many children described parents who avoided gendered language and modeled non-traditional roles, such as fathers participating in household chores. These practices provide schema-inconsistent information and highlight the family's importance in shaping early gender understandings (Nartey et al., 2023). However, this progressive influence was often challenged by other agents. Peers acted as strong enforcers of traditional gender norms through social policing, such as excluding children from games based on gender (Kretchmar, 2011). Schools presented mixed messages, while teachers often promoted equality verbally, everyday practices such as assigning cleaning tasks mainly to girls reinforced traditional roles.

Media, including *Mufasa: The Lion King*, played a dual role. It reinforced familiar gender ideals, such as princess fantasies, while also offering characters with blended traits that allowed children to imagine alternative gender possibilities (Nartey et al., 2023; Ogunbola et al., 2024). This shows that media can both strengthen and challenge existing gender schemas.

Overall, the findings show that gender role development is a dynamic and ongoing process shaped by competing socialization influences. Ghanaian children are active agents who interpret, question, and negotiate gender messages from family, peers, institutions, and media. Gender Schema Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how these messages are internalized, reinforced, and sometimes transformed. The study demonstrates that while traditional gender roles remain influential, children are increasingly exposed to diverse and cosmopolitan representations that encourage more flexible and egalitarian understandings of gender.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the research on the topic, investigating how foreign animations cultivate gender roles among Ghanaian children, using *Mufasa: The Lion King* as a case study, draws conclusions, makes recommendations, provides suggestions for future research, and acknowledges limitations.

## 5.1 Summary of Findings

The global spread of media has made cultural products from different countries easily available worldwide. As a result, foreign animations are now a regular part of many children's daily lives. This development raises important questions about how these media texts influence children's understanding of social ideas, especially gender roles. This study examined how foreign animations shape Ghanaian children's perspectives of gender roles, using *Mufasa: The Lion King* as a case study, it focused on children aged 9 to 12 and applied on Gender Schema Theory as a theoretical framework.

Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory (1981) argues that children actively learn gender roles from their social environment and organize this information into mental structures known as gender schemas. These schemas guide how children interpret what is appropriate for boys and girls. Media texts are therefore, an important source of gender information. When animations frequently show males as strong leaders and females as caring supporters, children may absorb these patterns into their schemas.

Methodologically, the study used a qualitative approach within the interpretive paradigm described by Denzin and Lincoln (2011). This approach focuses on understanding how people make meaning from their experiences. A case study design (Yin, 2018) was used to closely examine *Mufasa: The Lion King* and how Ghanaian children interpret it. The children were selected purposively because of their relevance to the research questions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the children and a detailed analysis of the animation. The film was analyzed thematically, and gendered themes representations were grouped into three categories: traditional, transitional, and egalitarian roles. Ethical procedures were carefully followed to protect the children. Combining film analysis with children's interpretations allowed for a deeper and more balanced understanding of media influence.

*Mufasa: The Lion King* portrays gender role development as a complex process shaped by several interacting influences. The film illustrates that a child's or cub's gender schema is not formed by a single agent but emerges through ongoing interaction between parental guidance, peer relationships, mentorship, and wider cultural norms.

## 5.2 Conclusion

This study shows that foreign animations, such as *Mufasa: The Lion King*, play an important but complex role in the gender socialization of Ghanaian children. Drawing Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981), the findings demonstrate that children do not passively accept media messages. Instead, they actively interpret and negotiate them. Children rely on gender schemas developed from their wider social and cultural environment to make sense of these media representations.

The interaction between media and lived experience creates a situation marked by tension and transition. The animation itself contains a mix of traditional and transitional gender portrayals, and children interpret these portrayals through their everyday experiences. While peer groups often reinforce traditional gender norms that are also promoted in the media, families frequently provide alternative models. Many families demonstrate more flexible and egalitarian gender roles, which challenge rigid stereotypes. As a result, Ghanaian children are influenced by multiple and sometimes competing sources, including foreign media, peer culture, and changing family practices.

Consequently, children's gender role perspectives are not fixed or uniform. Instead, they are continuously shaped and reshaped through interaction between media narratives and immediate social experiences. This study contributes to media effects research by showing that gender schema formation is a deeply contextual process. It highlights the central role of local institutions, especially the family, in mediating media influence within non-Western contexts.

In conclusion, Mufasa: The Lion King functions simultaneously as a mirror reflecting prevailing gender norms and also as a way of attracting new ways of thinking about gender roles. The animation's influence is shaped by the broader social context in which children are embedded, revealing the complex interplay between media content, cultural expectations, and individual experiences in the construction of gender roles.

### 5.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate that animation plays a significant role in shaping children's understandings of gender. In response, this study proposes recommendations for

key stakeholders, including parents, educators, animators, policymakers, and researchers, to intentionally use media as a tool for promoting more equitable gender schemas in Ghana.

The dominance of foreign animation is identified as a major cultural policy concern rather than merely a market issue, as it positions African children as consumers of "second-hand" culture (Nyamnjoh, 2002; SADC, 1996). To address this, it is recommended that, the government should enforce local content quotas in line with the Ghana Cultural Policy (2004) and the Children's Television Charter (1995) to reverse the decline in locally produced children's programming (Gerning, 2013; Osei-Hwere, 2008). In addition, government support through a national fund for Ghanaian children's animation is necessary to address infrastructural challenges and to encourage culturally grounded storytelling based on local myths and histories (Bonney, 2021; Esseku et al., 2023).

Integrating media literacy into the national curriculum would further support this effort by moving beyond guidance on screen time to fostering critical engagement with media content, enabling children to identify and challenge stereotypes (Aley & Hahn, 2020; Bedekar & Joshi, 2020; Puni-Nyamesem, 2021).

For media production, animators are encouraged to prioritize culturally relevant narratives, ensure balanced and equitable gender representation, and develop edutainment content that combines learning with entertainment, thereby countering the stereotypical portrayals often found in imported media (Alhasan, 2005; Shawcroft et al., 2022; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2016; Wardaniningsih & Kasih, 2022).

Finally, families, educators, and civil society organizations should promote active mediation and critical co-viewing, implement school-based media literacy initiatives, and

deliberately support locally produced animation to strengthen children's cultural identity (Nickerson, 2024; Kretchmar, 2011; Taj & Kalsoom, 2021; Nyamnjoh, 2002). Future research should build on this study by adopting longitudinal and cross-regional approaches, examining digital platforms, and prioritizing child-centered methodologies to better understand children's evolving media experiences and meaning-making processes (Osei-Hwere, 2008; Workalemahu, 2008).

### 5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

To deepen the understanding of how animations shape gender perceptions among children, future research could expand in the following key directions:

A long-term study could track how repeated and sustained exposure to egalitarian animations influences children's gender schemas over several years. This would provide a clearer picture of whether counter-stereotypes have lasting impacts or whether initial schema adjustments fade with time. Future studies should compare how children in different socio-cultural contexts, particularly rural versus urban settings respond to gender portrayals in foreign animations. This could reveal how traditional versus modern environments influence schema retention or revision.

Understanding how gender schema formation and transformation vary across age groups such as early childhood (3–7 years) versus adolescence (13–18 years) could provide insights into the most critical periods for intervention and media engagement.

Hopefully, these avenues can help build a more robust and inclusive understanding of how gender roles are learned, challenged, and reshaped in an increasingly media-driven world.

## 5.5 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into how foreign animations like Mufasa: The Lion King shape children's gender schemas, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the scope of the sample was limited to children from relatively affluent households in the urban area of Tema West. This focus excludes rural and lower-income contexts, where media access, cultural values, and parenting styles may differ significantly. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the broader diversity of childhood experiences across Ghana.

Secondly, the study centered on a single animation, Mufasa: The Lion King. While this allowed for in-depth analysis, it restricts the ability to generalize findings across the broader landscape of foreign children's media. Future research would benefit from analyzing a wider range of animations to identify recurring themes and patterns in gender portrayal.

Additionally, the study measured short-term perceptions, after viewing the animation for at least 5 times over a period of 5 months. Cultivation theory emphasizes the cumulative impact of prolonged exposure over time. Thus, without longitudinal data, the research cannot definitively assess how deeply or permanently the observed schema shifts may take root.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valid and meaningful contributions to understanding the media's potential role in shaping gender perceptions among Ghanaian children. It opens up space for broader conversations about representation, cultural values, and the evolving nature of gender socialization in a media-saturated world.

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# APPENDIX 'A'

## CODING INSTRUMENT

**Objective One:** To investigate the various gender roles in the selected children's animation

**Research Question One**: What are the various gender roles in the selected children's animation?

Animation: .....  Duration: ...……

Date of Release:  Number of Scenes: .....

| Gender roles | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Traditional Masculine roles** | **characters** | **Transitional Masculine roles** | **characters** | **Traditional Feminine roles** | **characters** | **Transitional Feminine roles** | **characters** | **Egalitarian roles** | **characters** |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |

## CODING INSTRUMENT

**Objective two: To analyze children's perspectives on the gender roles in the selected animation**

**Research question two: what are children's perspectives on the gender roels in the selected animation.**

Animation: .....  Duration: ...……

Date of Release:  Number of Scenes: .....

| characters | Gender roles | Children's perspective | Key themes |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**Objective 3**: To examine the socialization agents reflected in the gender roles in the selected children's animation and in the children's real-life experiences.

**Research question 3:** What are the socialization agents reflected in the gender roles in the selected children's animation and in the children's real-life experiences?

Animation: ..... Duration……..……

Date of Release: ..... Number of Scenes: .....

**Socialization agents reflected in the gender roles in the selected animation**

| **Socialization agents** | **Character influence** | **description** | **Outcomes** |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**Socialization Agents reflected in the children's real life experiences**

| **Socialization Agents** | **Gender role advocacy** | **Key influence** | **Children's examples** |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

# APPENDIX B

## Interview guide

This interview guide is designed to collect data for an academic research project and will be used solely for academic purposes. Your identity will remain confidential, and all ethical guidelines will be strictly followed.

Name of parent/ Guardian: _____

I consent to my child participating in this interview: (signature) -
_____

Background information of the respondents

Name:

Age:

Sex:

Research question 2: What are children's perceptions on the gender roles in the selected animation- *Mufasa: The lion king.*

How often do you watch animations?

Do you remember the first time you watched Mufasa: The lion king and where did you watch it?

Tell me the story in the animation; Mufasa: The lion king

1. In what ways are the roles of male characters; Mufasa, Simba, Obasi, Taka, Masego, Rafiki, Kiros, Zazu, Pumbaa, and Timon similar or different from the roles of boys and men in the society?

2. Do these roles inspire you to behave similarly or differently (Name each character), why?

3. Whose is your favourite character, why?

4. Which character's role do you want to be like, and why?

5. In what ways are the roles of female characters like Eshe, Afia, Sarabi and Kiara similar or different from the roles of girls and women in the society?

6. Do these roles inspire you to behave similarly or differently, (name each character) why?

7. Whose is your favourite character, why?

8. Which character's role do you want to be like, and why?

9. Do you think boys and girls should have the same roles (like house chores, cooking, cleaning) different roles (girls should cook and clean and boys should wash cars, play football) or a combination of both, why?

10. What roles in the animation do your parents, siblings, friends, school, or church say are appropriate for boys and girls, why?

11. How do you feel about these suggested roles by your parents, siblings, friends, school or church?

12. Anything else you would want to add?