

RESEARCH PAPER

WOMEN AND CERAMICS IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Women have played a great deal of role in the ceramic traditions of Ghana and beyond. The practice of ceramics in Ghana indigenously has been women-centric. Though ceramics is intimately associated with women in a traditional context, they have been marginalized in academic, contemporary art, and indigenous settings. The study looks at the shift in gender dynamics of ceramics, especially for attaining the goal of advocating for women ceramic artists in academia and practice. Data was collected using a survey, interview, and observation. The study revealed that women in ceramics have not been in mainstream academia due to issues with terminal degrees, a shift from the ceramic field, cultural and structural challenges, and low history in exhibitions, publications, and residencies. They also have difficulty setting up, unavailability of jobs in the industry, inadequate role models, lack of mentorship, and technological challenges have caused a shift from women-centric to male dominated practice. A model was developed to address this shift and to spur collaboration between women in academia and indigenous industry.

Keywords: Women, Ceramics, Academia, model, contemporary and traditional.

INTRODUCTION

Ghanaian ceramic art has been practiced indigenously by women who produced earthenware vessels to serve primarily utilitarian purposes and sometimes for aesthetics and ritual purposes. Literature clarifies that women have traditionally made ceramic vessels intrinsic for domestic and everyday use (Nortey et al., 2017). Strangely, although women traditionally practiced pottery or ceramic art, historical accounts and literature only mention males as significant contributors to its development in Ghana. At the National Council for Education of the Ceramic Arts 2021 (NCECA) in Ohio Cincinnati, there were four demonstrating artists, of which 2 were women. There were also 69 female ceramic artists (speakers) against 55 male artists/speakers (NCECA 2021). While this is encouraging news from the Global North that inclusion and representation of women ceramic artists in the dialogues of the

field, the dynamics, and statistics in the Global South, especially Ghana, are worrisome.

Interestingly, men were not encouraged to practice ceramics in West African ethnic culture (Schimelman, 1997; Frank, 1998), but currently, the once women-centric ceramic practice has given way to a male-dominant status. In Ghanaian academia, there are considerable gaps in terms of representation. The poor showing is evident at exhibitions and other ceramic art fora (See Fig. 1). The Ceramics section at KNUST, the leading ceramic institution in Ghana established in 1952, has no records of women as lecturers/instructors/technicians. The same is true for the Ceramic education program at the University of Education Winneba, Ghana. Interestingly, the statistics differ for other art programmes in Ghana. For instance, the textiles and fashion fraternity have many females furthering their studies up to the Ph.D. level and rigorously involved in exhibition making and participation.

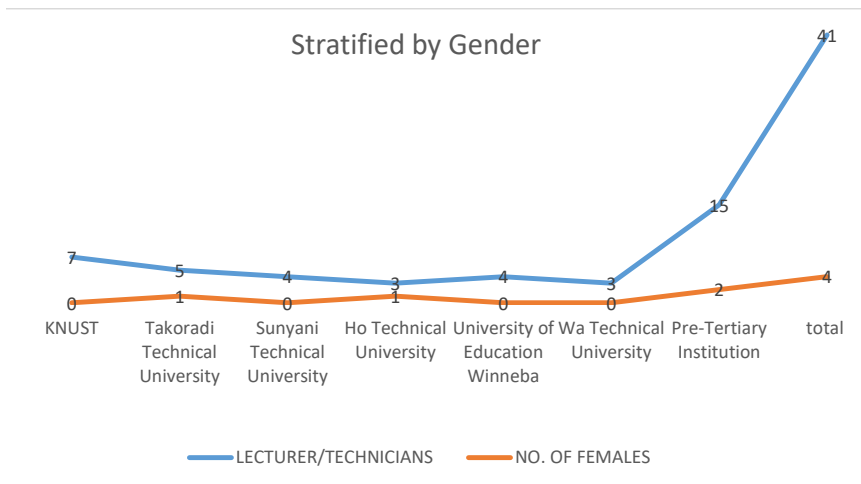


Fig. 1: Ceramic Women teachers in Ghanaian Academic Institutions

Source: Samuel Nortey 2021

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Though ceramics is intimately associated with women in a traditional context, they have been marginalized in academic and contemporary art settings. As a practicing ceramic artist, an art historian, and an art educationist, the study is interested in diving deeply into the shift in the gender dynamics of ceramics, especially towards the goal of advocating for women ceramic artists in academia and the indigenous industry as a whole. This study examines the role of women in Ghanaian ceramics, traditionally and contemporaneously, consider gender shifts pertaining to the transition from traditional to academic spheres, and provide evidence for future advocacy.

METHODS

The study used quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather data. Deeper interaction and description of women's activities in the industry and academic space backed by graphical interpretation were done. In order to understand the phenomenon, there were extensive travels and visits to ceramic centres in the regions of Ghana, specifically Afari in the Ashanti Region, Tanoso in the Bono Region, Sirigu in the Northern region, Vume and Kpando in the Volta region, Winneba in the Central region and few other places in Accra. For five months, The researcher had to strategize to visit these centres, including academic institutions, to interview and discuss traditional and contemporary women and ceramics, considering the shifts in the transition from traditional to academic spheres. Since there was no data or a tracer study to know the current location of women who studied ceramics, The researcher adopted the snowball sampling technique to gather women who studied ceramics. The technique led to four (4) women teaching ceramics at Ghanaian senior high schools. In order to gather the correct data to answer the research question and have scientific results to fill the research gap, The researcher used workshops

and visits to women within the traditional practice to gather the needed information.

The study adopted two data collection techniques to seek information from participants trained at a tertiary level: a well-designed survey questionnaire for 63 females ceramists and focus group discussions with 10 female ceramists. The questionnaire contained both open- and close-ended questions covering issues on education, the current working sector, challenges in the industry, and the way forward. The questionnaire was administered using google form/a google link. The responses were collated (into an excel sheet, google doc spreadsheet) coded, and analyzed using SPSS. A model was developed out of the study findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample Characteristics

The study sampled 60 women graduates from ceramic programmes in Ghana. Some are working in the ceramic industry, and most are working in other industries. Out of the research participants, 48 have BFA, two have MFAs in Ceramics, six have progressed to earn MSc and MA degrees, and two have obtained MBAs. Two are currently studying for their Ph.D. in Art Education. Among the sampled population, just a few (10.7%) are still working as ceramists in the industry, with a majority having branched off into other endeavours (24%) in fields such as trading and business. A significant number (57%) are into teaching at the basic and senior high school levels. Two women out of the 60 sampled for the study are teaching ceramics at the Ho and Takoradi Technical Universities. 7% are in the banking sector, while 1.3% are in the security agencies.

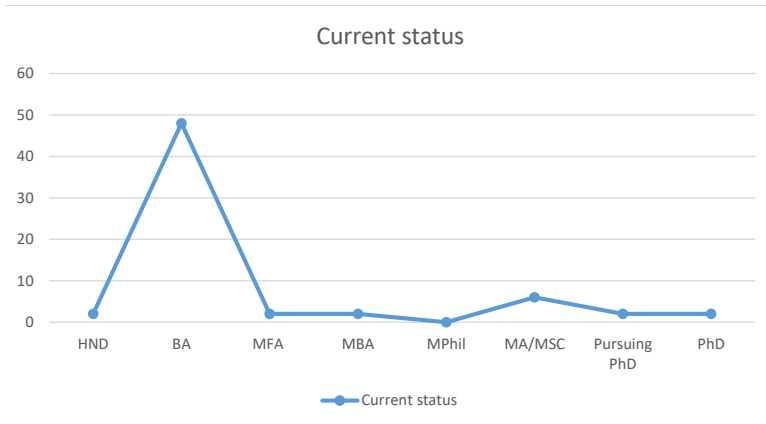


Fig. 2: Status of degrees earned by trained Ghanaian ceramists

Source: Samuel Nortey

The role of Women in Ghanaian Ceramic Practice

Over the years, Ghanaian women have played a leading role in ceramics and supporting the Ghanaian ceramic community with their versatile clay manipulation and creations. The societal structure of Ghana and, by extension, Africa demands women to take care of the home especially supporting their husbands to take care of the children. According to Young (2002), touted as traditional woman’s work handed down throughout countless generations, ceramics form and design have been a matriarchal heritage associated with the people of West Africa and Native American women. Indigenously, women improved their clays through the traditional stabilization process and used the improved material to build houses for their families. These clay houses are widespread in the villages in Ghana and most West African countries. These buildings, commonly called mud houses “atakpami”, were built using clay with bamboo serving as the reinforcement material. For years, these buildings remained strong and were only patched once in a while. Products such as clay wares were made to facilitate

domestic chores. Again, these women continue to provide superior ceramic vessel production and vessel-making services. The “Ahina” (water pot) is used to store water and serves as a chiller, just as a refrigerator does. Female potters in Vume in the Volta region of Ghana are noted for producing pottery for the Ghanaian poultry industry. They produce these wares that help in brooding day-old chicks. Ghanaian Women in ceramics often work together (see fig. 3) though they may have individual contracts.

Women continue to play a great deal of role with a shift in providing domestic wares and decorative pieces to enhance the beauty in the home and public spaces. Renna Agyeman, a student who graduated with First Class (Hons) in ceramics, now produces flower pots and other decorative pieces. She works in Mfensi (A town in Ashanti Region). She collects her clay from the riverside at Mfensi and seasons the clay to homogeneity. Before she set up this clay business, she worked with Vicalx Brick and Tile Company in Mfensi. Through deeds of hard work, she rose to the rank of Assistant Production Manager supporting her head of production. At Vicalx, she developed many innovations, including alternative dyes for the

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extruding machine. As Vincentelli concluded, “ceramics may sometimes have been a site of oppression, but more often they have been

a site of power and pleasure in an unequal world” (p.271); this is true of women in Ghanaian ceramics practice.



Fig. 3: Women working on their ceramic production in Sirigu, Northern Ghana

Source: Image by Samuel Nortey

Gender Shifts in Ghanaian Ceramic Practice

In the researcher's extensive travels to ceramic centres in Ghana, the researcher gathered that women were inextricably intertwined with ceramic production in almost every region in Ghana. Their main work is in the area of producing earthenware and other domestic vessels. These women use the vessels they produce to serve their husbands and family members. According to women potters in Vume, Michael Cardew (a British Potter), who visited the Gold Coast in the 1930s, was very much interested in the skills and design expertise of these women who did not know technology, such as the potters' wheel, in producing works. The hand is the best tool for these women; over the years, experience equips them to produce domestic and functional works.

According to Stephen Bonney, a chief ceramist at Vume in the Volta region, When Michael Cardew arrived in the Gold Coast (presently Ghana), he visited the Vume pottery centre and admired their skills in ceramic production. Harrod (1989) confirmed that Michael Cardew was then in charge of the Alajo Ceramic Production centre in Accra, which the British government set up under the Achimota school's supervision. Michael Cardew then offered to expand the training of the Vume potters by introducing them to throwing on the wheel and other technological operations such as kiln construction. Cardew built a studio in Vume for practicing women to use in their pottery production (see figure 4). Women who were then using the open pit firing technique were trained in kiln construction using firewood as a source of firing. Production was doubled, and business accelerated for many Vume potters trained in

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throwing on the wheel and kiln construction. It must be emphasized that the women had challenges concerning throwing and kiln construction. The kiln construction was a form of apprenticeship as the women learned informally while it was being constructed at their working site. Vicentelli (2000) recorded, "A potter's wheel requires an investment in a piece of quite complicated technology usually made of wood or metal, both techniques associated with men, and it would typically have bearings to allow it to spin with minimum friction. Therefore, women will likely be unable to make their own wheels (p.49). Further investigation into how many could throw on the wheel yielded a few results, but currently, very few women in the indigenous setup can work on the wheel. Within academia, the few still in practice after their tertiary education can throw, and Renna Agyeman is a classic example.

The inference could be derived from the fact that the gender shifts in Ghanaian ceramics started from the introduction of technology in the production setup, and men took the opportunity to learn the construction of kilns to assist women. The provision of an improved firing technique supported the ceramic industry's development in most regions. When ceramic production picked up commercially with the development of industrialization in the then Gold Coast, the women were relegated to the making of earthenware vessels, decorations, and selling, and men took over the making of vessels through the use of the potter's wheel. Currently, the studio space is being used by Stephen Bonney, a male potter in Vume, for his pottery production (see figure 5). The question is where are the women?



Figure 4: The structure built by Michael Cardew in Vume for Women to practice pottery

Source: Image by Samuel Nortey

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Gradually, men became dominant in the production field, while Ghanaian women became assistants in the production cycle. Until recently, the women who were matriarchs of the practice in the Gold Coast have become retailers, selling the vessels in shops owned by them and their husbands. Culturally, it started as a family profession, but industrialization expanded it to involve other skillful workers who were not necessarily family members. Parenti (2020) intimated that between 6300-3000 BCE, China and Western countries transitioned ceramics into a male-dominated field with the invention of the potter's wheel. With more machinery came higher production rates and higher profit margins.

Moreover, this was around the period when gender roles regarding physical ability and domestic expectations began manifesting in Western societies. Ceramics was traditionally viewed as a physically intensive form of art. In Western culture, physical exertion was equated to masculinity; therefore, ceramics transitioned to a primarily male workforce in Western society. Though this may be true, many women are in mainstream academia in China, Western academic institutions, and United States of America universities. The researcher's three years of participation in NCECA conferences showed how women are playing influential roles in driving ceramics forward in their economy and nation-building in other parts of the world.



Figure 5: Stephen Bonney, a potter in Vume throwing a vase on a mechanized potter's wheel in the studio built by Michael Cardew for women

Source: Image by Samuel Nortey

CHALLENGES OF WOMEN IN THE GHANAIAN CERAMIC INDUSTRY

Role Models/Mentors and Lack of Job

The challenges of women in the Ghanaian ceramic community are not just limited to the indigenous practice but also within the academic fraternity. Women's challenges range from role models, setting up challenges, low exhibition histories, publications, residencies, and lack of jobs. Strangely, role models appeared not to be an issue within the ceramic industry in Ghana. Most women did not see women role models as a significant issue. The study revealed that within the Ghanaian ceramic community, there are fewer results on women serving as role models in academia to inspire women to work in the field. In other disciplines in Ghanaian art practice, several females are adding their voices to their fields of specialization. Tracy Thompson, Adjo Kisseh, Dorothy Amenuke, and Ralitsa Debrah, to mention but a few, are all Ghanaian female artists contributing in diverse art specializations to the development of Ghanaian Art. As it stands now, the KNUST Ceramics programme has never had a female lecturer or a technician as part of the department since its establishment in 1952. The only female who taught for a year in the section was a visiting US Fulbright Scholar, Professor Jeannie Hulen. Jeannie Hulen taught Introduction to Hand forming and Wheel techniques and Glaze calculation. Such interventions of having female lecturers inspire younger ones to overcome their challenges; just as Chovwen (2004) puts it, you can overcome your present challenge because someone of your kind was able to overcome it (p.12). Jeannie Hulen arranged a semester's internship for a female Ghanaian student at the University of Arkansas. These are vast steps toward women's motivation to stay in the ceramics field.

The role model scoring lower marks (see fig. 6 below) in setting up confirms qualitative findings from the indigenous ceramic sector. Within the practice of ceramics in Ghana, women are very vibrant in making earthenware bowls and pots; however, the average age of these potters is 45 years. The more youthful women are currently not involved in the profession that provides the livelihood for the nuclear and extended family. According to the women interviewed in Vume in the Volta Region, Afari in the Ashanti region, and Sirigu in the Upper East region, their girls are not interested in making ceramic vessels. In this case, though there are women role models in practice, it is not a variable to getting in younger girls to be interested.

The Ghanaian ceramic industry lies mainly in the economy's private sector, and preponderantly the few companies employ only when they get big contracts. The Ghanaian government failed to sustain Saltpond Ceramics, producing earthenware and sanitary wares. The few bricks and tiles companies cannot absorb the graduates who come from the universities. Generally, these companies do not employ these graduates and, at best, push them into administrative positions. One sure way of addressing this setback of role models within the Ghanaian ceramic community and, by extension, other African countries is empowering women in leadership and technical roles. Ghanaian women must be encouraged to do their MFAs and take technician and lecturing positions in our academic institutions. Some argue that a number of women who trained in BA/BFA programmes resorted to MFA/MPhil Art Education because it was the only graduate programmes available to Ceramic graduates for a long time. The MFA was a late start at KNUST, however, there were opportunities in the Global North if one wanted to pursue MFA though funding challenges abound. Notwithstanding, the number of females that

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have pursued MFA at the Ceramic section is only two since the start of the millennium.

Setting up Challenges and Losing Interest

Two key findings of challenges of women who have studied ceramics at the tertiary level are set up after graduation vis a vis dwindling interest in ceramics, as shown in Fig. 6. It is worrying and frustrating that after university studies, there are no job opportunities in the field of study. Naturally, apathy would lead

to a gradual decline in interest. However, the ceramic programme requires graduates to be well-trained to build their own businesses. Results showed that setting up their own ceramic business is the biggest challenge for Ghanaian women in ceramics. This challenge appears to be essential in developing countries such as Ghana, as industrialization and restrictions tend to frustrate people who want to venture into setting up their businesses.

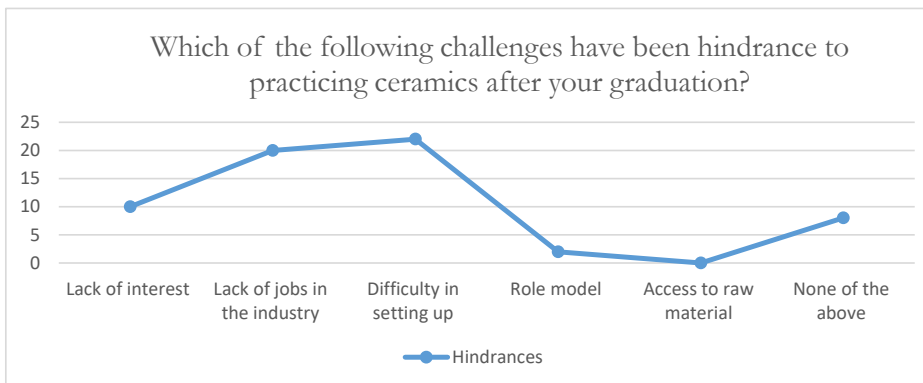


Fig. 6: Hindrances of Ghanaian women in ceramics practice

Source: Fieldwork 2021

However, training institutions have a role to play. Such results indicate that, institutions, should design their curriculum to include entrepreneurship. It has become imperative that the Ghanaian ceramics programme considers the economy of Ghana and redesigns the courses to capture intensive collaboration between academia and the industry. A good example is that strengthening industrial internship opportunities for students would expose them to industrial challenges. The exposure would equip them for the challenges ahead

However, despite these challenges, a few have been able to set up their studios. An example is Renna Agyeman, who worked with Vicalex Bricks and Tile Company and rose to the rank of Assistant Production Manager within an

enviable year. There was a strong indication that Renna became the principal person at the Bricks and Tile company, but she shifted to producing flower pots and other decorative pieces. The same goes for Christiana Batsa, who works alone in Ashaiman, Accra, producing decorative pots for halls and lounges. Christiana collaborates with women potters in Vume. She works with the Vume women potters and, after firing, transports them to Accra, her showroom for painting and decoration, before selling them. (see figure 7).



Fig. 7: Ceramic flower pots made and painted by Christiana Batsa

Source: Image by Samuel Nortey

Interviews established that these women face significant challenges in the industry. Most of them affirmed that there are rising issues of individualistic practice, which breaks the strength of practicing in terms of accessing financial and other logistic supports. Most women commented that “there is the need to form cooperatives with the aim of improving design concepts, sharpening skills and improving business plans to sustain activities.” Reviewing design concepts within women’s practice in the indigenous sector is very crucial to the continuous development of the industry. Nortey et al. (2013) called for ceramists to revise their design concepts, break in monotony and conservatism, and constantly spur new forms to attract the market.

Women in Ceramic Studies in Ghana

Though indigenous ceramic practice in Ghana has been the matriarch of women, its scholarly studies in Ghanaian institutions are males dominated. Ceramics is studied at the senior high level as an elective course and

then specialized at the tertiary level. Current statistics show an improvement in female enrolment, and this is due to background motivation (Nortey et al., 2013). As at the 2020/21 academic year at KNUST Ceramics section had recorded for the first year to final year a female to male ratio of 5:46, 13:46, 2:11, and 10:39 (Department of Industrial Art Examination Office). Since the establishment of the ceramics section in 1952, there have been fewer female enrolments. The females compete equally with the males and make first-class honours every year. Significant women in every year group compete very well in technological aspects of ceramics. They can throw on the potter’s wheel, prepare their materials, and use available machinery to process and facilitate their art productions (see figs. 8 & 9). The highest graduating cumulative weighted average within the ceramic studies at KNUST has been a female (Nancy Frimpong) with 77.43 (Industrial Art Examinations Office). Data indicates a good ratio in performance of female to male students. Despite this positive performance from females, it is distressing to note that there are negligible women in

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mainstream academic work. Interestingly, Nancy has branched off ceramics and is now working in the banking sector with an MBA degree. Such an exit from the field of ceramics is not beneficial to the development of ceramics in Ghana.

It brings into sharp focus the eighth model of lean thinking, which talks of the wasted potential of people, underlying people's talents, skills, and knowledge implying that resources employed into developing these women turn out to be unprofitable following their exit. Many women who might have selected a male-dominated career shift into a female-dominated career later in their career trajectory (Martin and Barnard, 2013). We must develop a model to address this severe shortcoming of diversion from mainstream ceramic practice if we desire to develop the best resources for the ceramic industry.

Focus group discussions and in-depth discussions reveal several cultural challenges, such as marriage and the inability to secure funding to further their education. Apart from the non-tertiary institutions, all tertiary institutions in Ghana require at least a Master's degree to gain employment. Since very few women have been able to acquire their MFAs, there seem to be deficient women in the academic field, and obviously, role models vis-a-vis mentorship will be a challenge. A few remarked, "we wished we had women as role models to look up to." Records from institutions show that only two women have requested to work as lecturers and technicians.

In all these requests, they gained the opportunity to lecture at technical universities. At KNUST, few records confirm extremely few applications from a woman to be a lecturer or technician. Obviously, this is not an institutional structural challenge but women's failure to further their studies and get into mainstream academics. Some argue

Only a few tertiary institutions in Ghana offer ceramics as a programme. The ceramics section at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology has been the leading institution in the training of ceramists in Ghana. Within the last decade, the Technical Universities such as Takoradi, Ho, Sunyani, and Wa have started offering ceramics programme. The Art Education programme at the University of Winneba has a ceramic component, but the focus is on education and less on studio practice. In Ghana's Basic and Senior High education system, there are more female teachers than male. However, this analysis differs within the same system's specialized ceramic teaching field. The number of female teachers in ceramics seems to reduce at the higher educational ladder. The few senior high schools with ceramics as one of the elective subjects of the visual art programme have fewer female teachers. Though this study is not about gender equity, the need for women's empowerment in mainstream academics is preponderantly the focus.



Fig. 8: Mercy Agbley working on her art work

Source: Image by Samuel Northey



Fig. 9: Mercy Agbley, *Togetherness*, clay, variables, 2021

Source: Image by Samuel Northey

Exhibitions, Publications, Conferences and Residencies

To progress in the field of academia calls for not just teaching but also mentorship, service to the community, exhibition, and research publication. A careful observation of Ghanaian women in ceramics is low exhibition history and research publications. Though the Ghanaian ceramic community is gradually glowing with exhibition organizations, the involvement of women has been minimal. In May 2015, when the KNUST Ceramic section organized a conference and exhibition, women missed the chance to exhibit or present a lecture. In 2019, when Jeannie Hulen, A US Fulbright Ceramic Scholar to KNUST, and Adam Posnak curated the *Ahooeden* exhibition, again Ghanaian women ceramic artists were missing as most artists were male.

The issue of the exhibition, research publications, attending conferences, and residencies have been a colossal challenge for not just Ghanaian women in ceramics but also men. There has been less showing in ceramics concerning exhibitions, research publications, and residencies. Significantly, these are areas of assessment for any academic promotion in Ghanaian tertiary institutions. Against this backdrop, the few women teaching ceramics have not been able to receive an appointment of promotion since their appointments for over 5years.

A great deal of mentorship is needed here as the Universities in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa demand rigorous research publications over exhibitions as a prerequisite to promotion, which should have been the reversal. There have been huge debates on artists' assessment of the promotion of this exhibition vis a vis publication and the issue of the same rubrics used in the engineering and sciences for ceramic studio artists.

Nonetheless, whether exhibitions or publications, there are challenges. Figure 10 shows responses from the respondents about publications. It shows clearly how women in the Ghanaian ceramic community are having challenges with research and publications. Indeed, there is little or no funding to support research and exhibition, which is a considerable challenge for lecturers and researchers in the global south. It also appears that fewer efforts are made during the undergraduate and postgraduate levels on research publications and exhibitions. Only the Ceramic section at KNUST runs the MFA programme in Ghana. There is a need to emphasize exhibitions, publications, and conference participation during graduate studies.

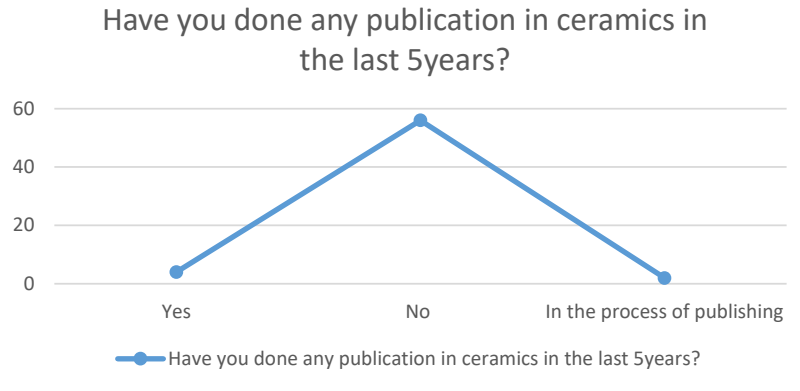


Fig. 10: Publications within the last five years

Source: Fieldwork

In May 2015, the Ceramics Section of KNUST organized a conference and exhibition and themed the event as *Developing Ceramics towards Nation's Benefit*. The conference and exhibition were structured to bring both institutions and industry players together to brainstorm the development of Ghanaian ceramics. No women ceramists presented and exhibited at the event. One way or the other, females failed to submit a proposal or exhibit their works. Quantitative analysis from the study revealed that women who graduated from academic institutions in Ghana have mixed feelings about exhibitions and publications. Analysis point to the fact that there is a slight difference between women who want to exhibit and those who have lost interest in ceramic exhibitions. Statistics show that a significant majority have not been involved in any exhibition and have not produced any artwork within the last five years. (see Fig. 11). Those who answered in the affirmative had just graduated from higher learning institutions and were works done in school. Interviews confirmed that most of these women, after their ceramic studies, branch into other fields and stop practicing as ceramists after a few years. Few offered that they do not have the studio to operate, and

the cost of building a kiln and firing becomes a challenge.

The issue of the ceramic exhibition has been one key challenge in the mainstream academic sphere. The Ghanaian ceramic community cannot show evidence of consistent ceramic exhibition until recently, where there are signals of awakening. Significantly, the *Ahooden* exhibition featured just one woman out of ten exhibitors. Perhaps, the default ethos of an exhibition in Ghana premised on the trade-fair-flavored salon style is filling the commercial galleries with artworks contrived to the tourists' eyes, pockets, and luggage bags (Woets, 2011; seid'ou 2021). The approach has had a negative influence on our exhibition-making processes. In the area of ceramic residencies, it is worrying that there is no record of women in ceramic residencies. Most of the respondents commented that they have not been able to apply for residencies because they feel disabled.

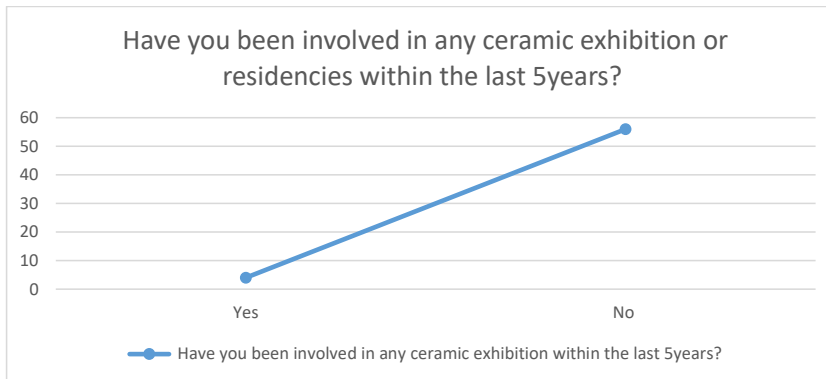


Fig. 11: Women involvement in ceramic exhibitions

Source: 2021 fieldwork

Women in Ceramics Model

The study presents a model developed to assist in the inclusion of women in the academic space and empower the same in the indigenous ceramic setup. The model is based on field experience from several years of interactions with women in ceramics, data collected and analyzed, and synthesis with the available literature on women and ceramics. The model has overarching calls in two parts - academia and industry. In the model, concepts are simplified to train and retain women in academia. The model starts with motivating women to come into the ceramic study. The role of women in developing traditional ceramics in Ghana cannot be over-emphasized, and this has to translate into mainstream academia. Motivating women can start as early as the basic level of education, where they are exposed to ceramics through working with clay, exhibitions and workshops. This strategy can be intensified at the senior high level, where they prepare for tertiary education.

Secondly, when women finally get admitted into tertiary studies, the structural pillars lie with the academic institutions as captured in the Nortey model must be implemented. The ceramic programme must ensure that during

their studies, there must be an intensive collaboration between academia and the industry. The collaboration would keep them abreast of the challenges in the industry. Again, in doing their internship, they are not restricted only to administrative roles but get into the pit, usage of the machinery, firing processes, etcetera. Similarly, women must be involved in all exhibition-making processes. They must also be exhibitors and not only help organize the event. When they complete their studies, as a policy of National Service, the institutions must consider females as teaching assistants/demonstrators alongside the males as part of their service to the nation. This option on the model is key to females entering into teaching because, for most Ghanaian students, it is during their teaching assistant appointment that they develop an interest in academia. Interested women must be offered scholarships to continue studies in MFA locally or internationally. Analysis showed that most of these women could not further their studies after the first degree. The few who do further branch off ceramics because they find it challenging to secure a scholarship in ceramics. Institutions demand rigorous portfolio which shows steady development of practice. These women’s inability to develop this portfolio affects their admission to do their

MFAs, as many universities abroad require such evidence. The model presents a strong collaboration between the women working in the indigenous setup and the academia. These women should be good resource persons in the classrooms, studios, and during institutional workshops to demonstrate their skills and dexterity. Through such exemplars, women would feel motivated, which obviously would go a long way in reviving the dying indigenous practice and strengthening academia. Everyone becomes a resource person and consultant in the end. The women in the indigenous industry should be engaged in the lecture rooms to demonstrate their practical skills. Likewise, students also go on hands-on training sessions at the working studio of these female ceramists. In doing this, each end feels very important and inextricably inseparable. An example is Nortey and Bodjawah's (2018) workshop with women of the Afari pottery centre. The women were very excited and motivated that their design thinking and skills had been sharpened and developed by learning to produce other ceramic products while maintaining their cultural heritage consciousness.

The model also identifies issues that prevent many women from leaving or practicing in the industry. The deterrents identified were technological limitations, funding, skills, and practice development.

Therefore, the model calls for support from both government and academic institutions to address pressing issues of women in the field. Periodically, academic institutions, with support from the government, facilitate workshops and symposia and engage women in national ceramic contracts. The analysis of field data revealed that a significant number of women leave the ceramic industry because of a lack of jobs and difficulty setting up a ceramic business. Indeed, when the government can engage these women by providing decorative pots at official buildings, facial tiles, bricks, and many more. Interventions such as the above example would boost their practice, and the retention rate in the ceramic industry would be high. The importation of ceramic products by the government also contributes to the decline in the industry in the country. The women can produce with little support. It is evident with a few established, such as Renna Ceramics, Happy Ceramics, Vume Women Potters, and Sirigu Women Potter, which the government and the public should support to sustain.

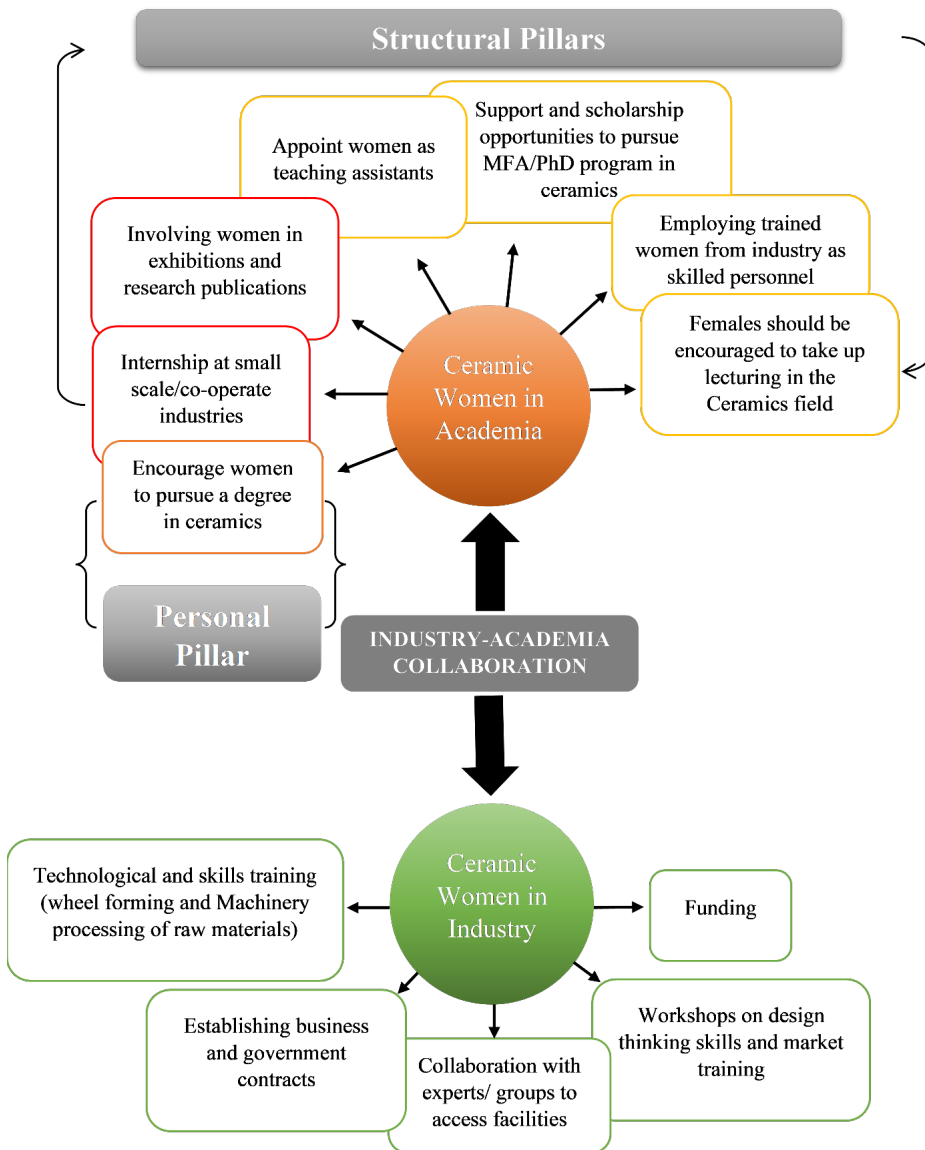


Fig. 12: Model for strengthening Ghanaian women in ceramics

Source: Fieldwork 2021

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to discuss women and ceramic practice in Ghana. The results show that issues must be addressed to get women well-established in the indigenous sector and work in mainstream academia. Women still have many roles to play as designers, decorators, and technical support, in research, exhibition, and academia. There is enough evidence that women can contribute enormously to the indigenous and contemporary academic ceramic practice. There is therefore no excuse for Ghanaian women to contribute to all aspects of the ceramic industry. In that case, women in Ghanaian ceramic practice must be well represented in mainstream academic teaching and they need guidance. We must not limit women to administrative job roles in the industry. However, they must also be included in the technological space while constantly developing their design thinking to spur innovations in forms. We need women who can challenge the assumptions and contribute their voices to the development of ceramics. Since there is a need to support Ghanaian women in ceramics, their development in academia preponderantly lies in implementing the model developed herein.

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