



FACTORS INFLUENCING THE GHANAIAN PUBLICS' ABILITY TO READILY RECOGNISE AND IDENTIFY ICONIC PERSONALITIES FROM THEIR ILLUSTRATED PORTRAITS

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Abstract:

It is assumed that the fame of certain personalities in Ghana, Africa and the world has grown to iconic proportions and that they are well known both by name and physiognomy. However, there is no certainty that the Ghanaian public is visually aware of the physiognomy of these icons, and can easily recognise and identify them from their illustrated portraits. This study attempts to investigate people's ability to recognise and identify iconic personalities from their illustrated portraits, through a survey of the sampled population in the Accra and Kumasi metropolises of Ghana. The sampled population consisted of 400 respondents made up of 200 each from Accra and Kumasi. The sample for each metropolis consisted of 50 JHS, 50 SHS, 50 tertiary students and 50 members of the general public outside the school system. Variations of illustrated portraits of three iconic persons were presented for identification. Most respondents especially, the JHS, SHS and the general public categories could not identify most of the images. This is as a result of their level of education, age, and knowledge of historical and current issues as well as the low level of publicity given to some of the iconic personalities. Again, most respondents in all the categories were not able to identify most silhouette drawings, with the exception of one in which the personality had distinct characteristics. This indicates that silhouette drawings may not be an ideal way of presenting portrait illustrations for identification. Results from the research has shown that the ability to recognise and identify iconic personalities is dependent on one's level of education, knowledge of historical issues and age. It also depends on the level of publicity an iconic personality enjoys, what he or she does and nationality. The technique used in rendering portrait illustrations of iconic persons also influences people's ability to recognise and identify those iconic personalities.

Keywords: iconography, physiognomy, iconic personalities, portraits, Ghana

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1. Introduction

The human portrait is without a doubt, the most frequently drawn and painted subject throughout the history of art. We seem to be endlessly fascinated with our faces and the faces of others, based on the vast number of self-portraits and portraits that have been created (Fisher & Robinson, 2008). Many portraits have been produced for public places such as city squares, civic or religious institutions, or for mass dissemination in the form of coins or in prints (West, 2004). The need to portray a person's individual characteristics sets portrait drawing apart from figure drawing (Horton, 1994). West (2004) argues that portraits are worthy of separate study because they are distinct from other genres or art categories in the ways they are produced, the nature of what they represent, and how they function as objects of use and display.

Critical observation reveals that the use of portrait illustrations and portraits in general of iconic figures past and present such as Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Dr. K. A. Busia, Alex Quaison Sackey, Tetteh Quashie, Kofi Annan and many more are nonexistent in Ghana as compared to the western world, where portraits of personalities such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr. and many others are made and used for various purposes. A typical example of the use of portraits of iconic personalities in the western world is the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in the United States of America, which depicts the faces of four former American presidents as shown in Plate 1.1 below.

Plate 1.1: Mount Rushmore National Memorial



Source: http://wikitravel.org/en/Mount_Rushmore_National_Memorial

Several important personalities past and present have made significant contributions to the social, cultural, economic and historical development of Ghana, Africa and the world at large. Such personalities include: Dag Hammarskjold, U Thant,

Trygve Lie and Kurt Waldheim who served as UN secretary generals during the formative years of the Organisation, as well as the present and not too distant past secretary generals such as Perez de Cuellar, Boutros Ghali, Kofi Annan and Ban Ki Moon. Similarly, there are personalities like W. B. E. Dubois, George Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah and many others spearheaded Pan-Africanism. It is also important to acknowledge the contributions of Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere and others to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Unfortunately, the public does not know their physiognomy, especially the younger generation. Though the public may be aware of the contributions of these personalities through available written documentation, it is equally important for the public to be aware of their physiognomy. A preliminary study conducted indicates that most people in Ghana cannot recognise and identify such iconic personalities from their illustrated portraits.

The report on Ghana's 2021 population and housing census shows that a sizeable proportion of 30.2% of the population is illiterate and cannot read and write in any language (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Information that is more visual than textual is preferred by this audience. Bamford (2003) argues that contemporary culture has become more and more dependent on visuals, especially for its capacity to communicate instantly and universally. The proverb "a picture is worth a thousand words" emphasises the importance of illustrations. The continuous use of portraits of iconic personalities for various purposes could help create public awareness of their physiognomy, and eventually leave a lasting memory in the minds of the public. Being aware of the physiognomy of such personalities will promote easy recognition and identification.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Iconography

Historically, iconography refers to the study of the subject matter or meanings of works of art as opposed to their form. It is most often discussed in the context of medieval and particularly renaissance studies, but can also be used in connection with any period of art. It is assumed that every image contains a certain amount of hidden or symbolic matter that can be elicited by a close reading of the image and some knowledge of the referential context of the work (Panofsky, 2009).

Iconography as a term may be defined as the science of identification, description, classification, and interpretation of symbols, themes, and subject matter in the visual arts. The term can also refer to the artist's use of this imagery in a particular work (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2012). However, for the purpose of this study, Clarke (2001) describes iconography as a term that refers to a collection of illustrations or portraits as well as the description of the body of images of a particular individual.

2.2 Drawing and Illustration

The history of drawing may be as old as the human race itself. The discovery of cave paintings dating back as far as 120,000 years BC indicates that man has always been

interested in making images (Horton, 1994). Drawing as described by Jarrett and Lenard (2000), is a way of using lines to convey meaning. It is said to have preceded the written word and it may have preceded spoken language as well. Drawing is one of the most basic ways to communicate and is still one of the best ways to convey information directly, despite the increasing prevalence of photography. Scientists, and in particular archaeologists, actually prefer to draw many items because a detailed drawing can be more precise and informative than a photograph since it involves a process of selection (Horton, 1994). A drawing could also be labeled to show the different parts for teaching and future reference.

For the early human, drawing was an essential response to life as knowing which roots were good to eat and which were good to rub on wounds (Jarrett and Lenard 2000). In prehistoric times, drawings were used to exchange ideas and information, celebrate and record the details of life, solve mysteries, revere and give thanks, wish and dream (Jarrett and Lenard 2000). According to the National Museum of Illustration in Rhode Island, U.S.A, illustration serves as a reservoir of our social and cultural history. It is, therefore, a significant and enduring art form (Zeegen 2005). Illustrations play a part in defining important moments and periods in time. Illustration has recorded man's achievements, interpreting them in a way not possible before the birth of photography. This can be seen in the paintings of Pompeii, the aboriginal paintings of Australia, and the great frescos of Italy. Refer to plates 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3.

Plate 2.1: Dirce's punishment - Roman wall painting in House of the Vettii, Pompeii



Source: <http://www.google.com.gh/imgres?q=paintings+of+pompeii&hl>

Plate 2.2: An Aboriginal rock painting depicting the coming of Europeans



Source: <http://www.google.com.gh/imgres?q=aboriginal+paintings+of+australia&hl>

Plate 2.3: Sistine Chapel Ceiling frescoes, Vatican, Italy



Source: <http://www.google.com.gh/imgres?q=frescoes+of+italy>

2.3 Portraits Illustration/Portraiture

Several writers have put forward various definitions of what a portrait is. In simple terms, a portrait is usually a work of art that represents a unique individual (West, 2004). Similarly, Borgatti (1990) also describes a portrait as depicting a specific person. In a broader definition, a portrait is commonly perceived as the representation of a human being's features, whether the face, head and shoulders or the whole body (Civardi, 2002). In Seckel (1993), portraiture is described as the physiognomic likeness based on direct observation of a living person. Apart from a portrait's relation with likeness as contained in a person's physiognomy, it can also represent the subject's social position or inner life, such as their character or virtues. By this extension, the portrait may be seen as a sort of general history of the life of the person it represents (West, 2004). West further argues

that portraits are not just likenesses, but works of art that present ideas of identity as they are perceived, represented, and understood in different times and places. As objects, portraits are executed in a range of media. Painting remains by far the most common medium of representation in portraiture, but prints, drawings, and portrait sculpture in the form of busts, tombs, and monuments are also prevalent (West, 2004). Aside from all of these definitions, the idea of portraiture is based on the desire to remember and be remembered, be it personal or political, ritual or social. The nature of portrayal differs from culture to culture (Borgatti, 1990).

Portraiture has always been an important theme in figurative arts and a favourite with artists, who have found in it, not just a professional genre well rewarded and socially appreciated for its symbolic or celebratory value, but also an interesting opportunity to investigate the human condition in its physical and most of all psychological aspect.

The functions of portrait illustrations and portraits, in general, cannot be overemphasized. Portraits are representations, but they are also material objects, and as such, they have a variety of functions. Among the functions of a portrait are: as a work of art, as a biography of the person it represents, as a document, as proxy and gift, as commemoration and memorial and finally as a political tool. Because of the many different forms they take, portraits have been and can be used for a variety of dynastic, commemorative, judicial, personal, and propagandist purposes. Portraits, therefore, take a number of physical forms and serve a multiplicity of aesthetic, political and social functions (West, 2004).

3. Methods and Methodology

3.1 Research Perspective

The qualitative research methodology was used with an emphasis on the survey research method. Qualitative research investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations or materials (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996). This type of research seeks to obtain a holistic impression of what is being investigated. The survey research design was chosen because it enabled the researcher to use many subjects through the use of questionnaires to collect data. Survey research has always been exploratory in nature (Punch, 2003). When little research has been done on a subject, surveys allow the researcher to establish an overview before research is conducted to probe and analyse the issue with qualitative approaches or experimental and quantitative approaches (Babbie, 1990).

3.2 Research Context and Participants

The research context was one that involved four categories, comprising: i) Junior High School (JHS) students, ii) Senior High School (SHS) students, iii) Tertiary Students (University and Polytechnics), and iv) Others (members of the general public outside the school system) in Accra and Kumasi Metropolises of Ghana. More often, the population that a researcher targets to study is too large to manage effectively. In such cases, a sampling technique is employed to select a sample or unit of the population to study in

detail. A stratified sampling technique was employed for the study. The sample selected from the accessible population consisted of 400 respondents made up of 100 JHS students forming one stratum, 100 SHS students forming the second stratum, 100 tertiary students forming the third stratum, and 100 members of the General Public outside the school system forming the fourth stratum. The sample for each metropolis was grouped into the following categories: 50 JHS, 50 SHS, 50 tertiary students and 50 members of the general public outside the school system. The equal distribution of the selected sample among the four categories of respondents was purposively done in order to provide equal grounds for a comparative analysis of the performance of the various categories.

Participants recruited for the study were briefed about the study and were also given the freedom to opt-out if they chose not to participate in the study. For this reason, their informed consent was sought. The anonymity of the identity of respondents was also assured. It was also clarified to participants that no monetary gains would be given to participants involved in the study.

3.3 Instruments for Data Collection

Purposive and random sampling were used to administer questionnaires to respondents. After purposively selecting participants, a random sampling method was used to administer the questionnaire to respondents in the four categories namely JHS students, SHS students, Tertiary students and members of the general public outside the school system in each metropolis.

3.4 Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis comprised of descriptive statistics and this is presented in tables and graphs.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Ability to Identify Illustrated Portraits of Iconic Personalities

In all, three versions of illustrated portraits of three iconic personalities were presented for identification. The images were grouped in sets of three to form three questions. Refer to plates 1, 2 and 3. Based on the analysed results of the data gathered, it can be inferred that the ability to recognize and identify illustrated portraits of iconic personalities is dependent on one's level of education, knowledge of historical and current issues, one's interest, as well as a person's age. It also depends greatly on the level of publicity an icon enjoys and the technique of rendering the portrait. Generally, the performance of respondents for all the questions was above average. However, respondents in the tertiary category performed quite well as compared to the other categories. Data presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3, indicates that respondents did quite well in identifying images in questions 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

Question 1: Identify the following images:



A B C

Plate 1: Images A, B and C of Question 1

4.1.1 Performance of Respondents in Identifying Images A, B and C of Question 1

The performance of respondents in all the images for question 1 was the lowest. Respondents in all the categories secured scores above 50 for image A, with a highest score of 75 and a lowest score of 58, resulting in a total percentage score of 64.5%. On the other hand, the performance of respondents in all the categories was low in identifying image B of question 1, scoring below 50, with a highest score of 25 and a lowest of 8, resulting in a total percentage score of 18.75%. Lastly, responses for image C of question 1 was not encouraging, with the highest score of 54 and the lowest being 40. Respondents in two categories specifically JHS and SHS scored 50 and above, while the other two being the Tertiary and General Public scored below the 50 marks. This also resulted in a total percentage of 47.25% as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' scores for images A, B and C of Question 1

Image		Respondents				
		JHS	SHS	Tertiary	Others	Total
A	Right	58	60	75	65	258 (64.5 %)
	Wrong / No Answer	42	40	25	35	142 (35.5%)
B	Right	8	22	20	25	75 (18.75 %)
	Wrong / No Answer	92	78	80	75	325 (81.25%)
C	Right	54	50	45	40	189 (47.25%)
	Wrong / No Answer	46	50	55	60	211 (52.75%)

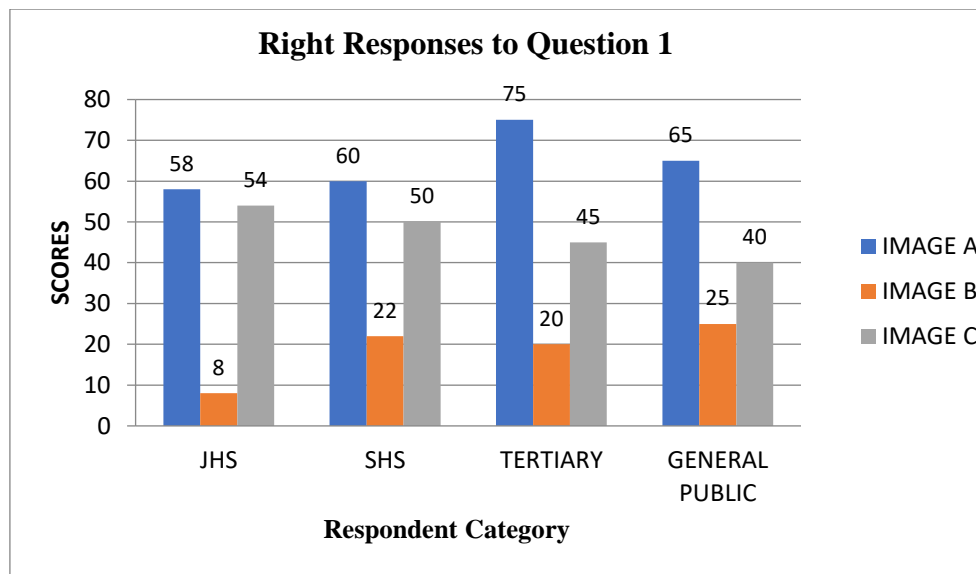


Figure 1: Respondents scores for images A, B and C of Question 1

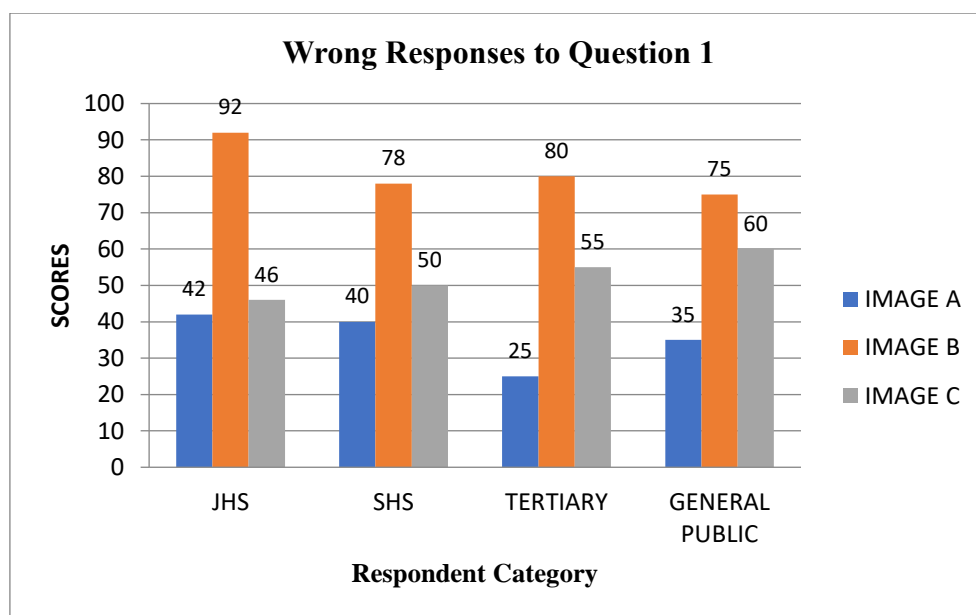
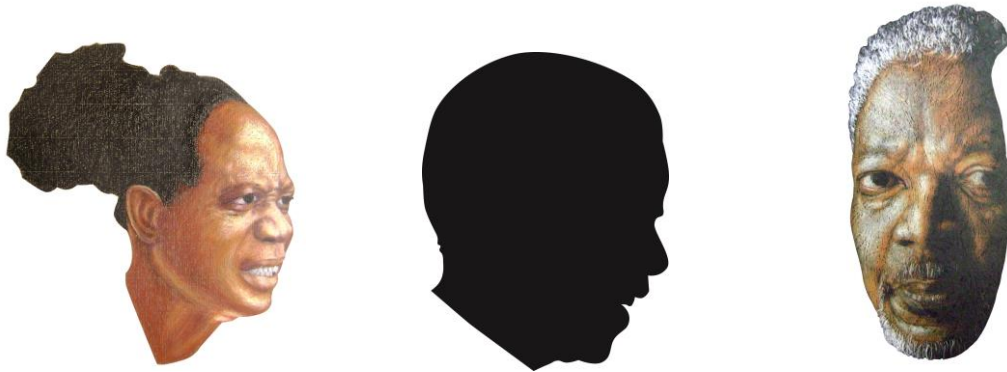


Figure 2: Respondents scores for images A, B and C of Question 1

Question 2: Identify the following images:



A B C

Plate 2: Images A, B and C of Question 2

4.1.2 Performance of Respondents in Identifying Images A, B and C of Question 2

The performance of respondents in question 2 was generally good. Respondents in all the categories had scores above 50 for images A and C, while respondents in all the categories scored below 50 for image B. Responses for image A were very good with a score of 81 as the highest and 65 as the lowest, resulting in a total percentage of 73.5%. Just like image B of question 1, respondents performed poorly in identifying image B of question 2, with a score of 24 as the highest and 9 as the lowest. This resulted in a total percentage score of 18.5%. Finally, respondents did remarkably well in identifying image C, scoring 84 as the highest and 70 as the lowest, resulting in a total percentage score of 76.75% as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Respondents' scores for images A, B and C of question 2

Image		Respondents				
		JHS	SHS	Tertiary	Others	Total
A	Right	70	78	81	65	294 (73.5 %)
	Wrong / No Answer	30	22	19	35	106 (26.5%)
B	Right	9	20	21	24	74 (18.5 %)
	Wrong / No Answer	91	80	79	76	326 (81.5 %)
C	Right	70	79	84	74	307 (76.75%)
	Wrong / No Answer	30	21	16	26	93 (23.25%)

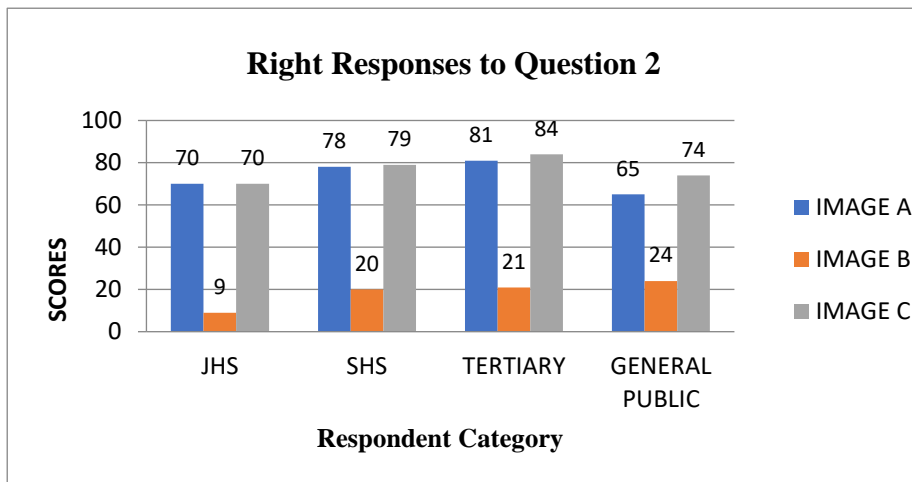


Figure 3: Respondents scores for images A, B and C of Question 2

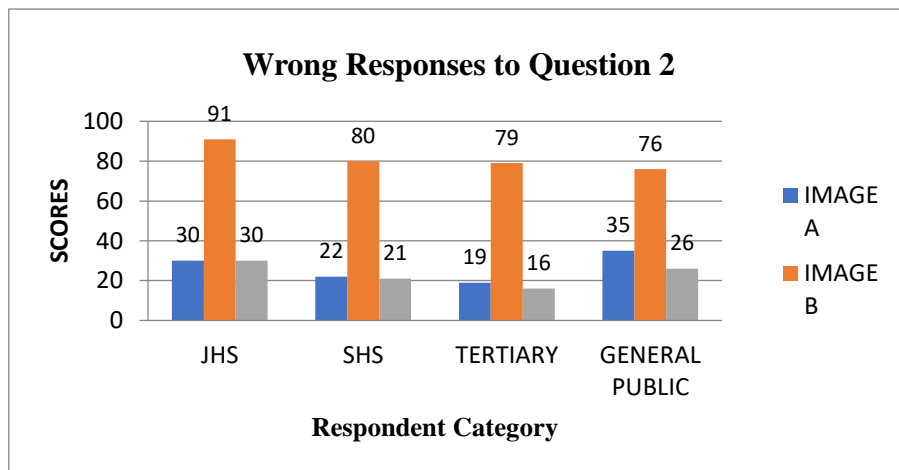


Figure 4: Respondents scores for images A, B and C of Question 2

Question 3: Identify the following images:



A B C

Plate 3: Images A, B and C of Question 3

4.1.3 Performance of Respondents in Identifying Images A, B and C of Question 3

Respondents performed remarkably well in identifying the images for question 3. All the categories of respondents secured scores above the 50 mark for all the images. Responses

for image 'A' were a little above average with a score of 64 as the highest and 51 as the lowest giving a total percentage score of 57.75%. Performance of respondents for image B were extremely high with 91 as the highest and 81 as the lowest giving a total percentage score of 86.5%. Again, the performance of respondents for image C was very good with 83 as the highest score and 64 being the lowest, with a total percentage score of 72.75%. The data in Table 3 below show respondents scores for each image for question 3.

Table 3: Respondents scores for images A, B and C of Question 3

Image		Respondents				
		JHS	SHS	Tertiary	Others	Total
A	Right	51	56	60	64	231 (57.75 %)
	Wrong / No Answer	49	44	40	36	169 (42.25%)
B	Right	81	87	91	87	346 (86.5%)
	Wrong / No Answer	19	13	9	13	54 (13.5%)
C	Right	66	64	83	78	291 (72.75%)
	Wrong / No Answer	34	36	17	22	109 (27.25 %)

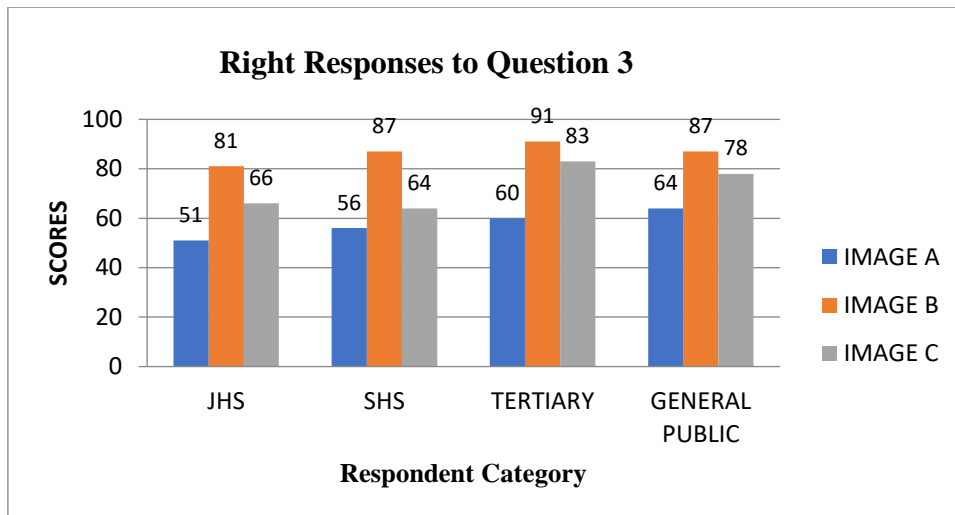


Figure 5: Respondents scores for images A, B and C of Question 3

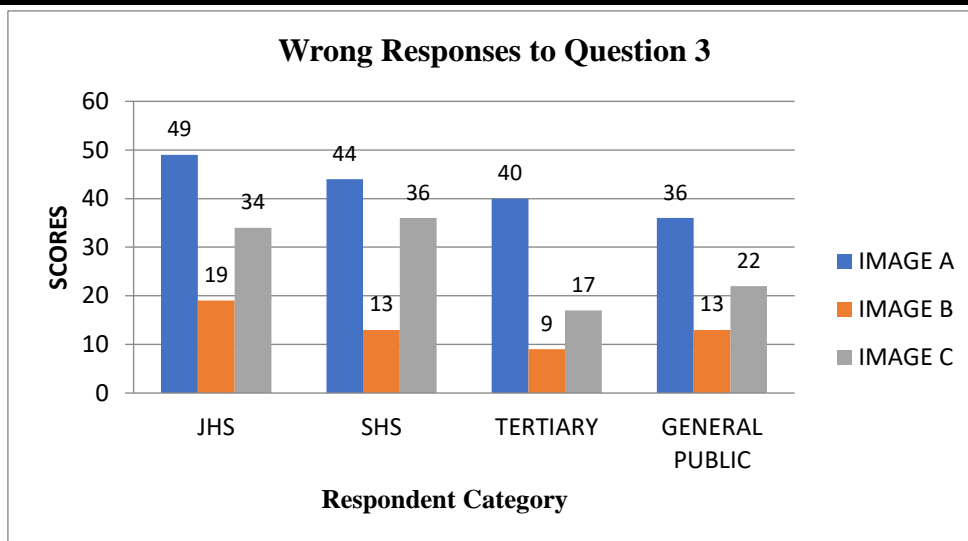


Figure 6: Respondents scores for images A, B and C of Question 3

4.2 Comparative Analysis of the Performance of the Various Groups of Respondents

Respondents in the tertiary category performed quite well securing the highest scores for most of the images for all the questions. They had 75 as the highest score for image A of question 1, 81 and 84 for images A and C of question 2 respectively. They also had 91 and 83 as the highest scores for images B and C of question 3 respectively. However, in instances where they had the second or third highest score, the difference between their score and that of the highest score was very marginal. This comparison is seen in images B and C of question 1 where respondents in the tertiary category had the third highest score of 20 and 45 respectively compared to the highest score of 25 and 54 for images B and C of question 1 by respondents in the General Public, and JHS categories. Similarly, the difference between the second-highest score of 21 for image B of question 2 by respondents in the Tertiary category and the highest score of 24 for the same image by respondents in the General Public category is also very marginal. Again, there is a marginal difference between the second-highest score of 60 for image A of question 3 by respondents in the tertiary category and the highest score of 64 for the same image by respondents in the General Public category.

The next group of respondents who did quite well in identifying the images are those in the General Public category followed by the SHS and JHS in that order. The heterogeneous nature of respondents in the General Public category comprising of literates, semi-literates and illiterates account for their performance. Unlike the Tertiary, SHS and JHS categories, where respondents had a similar educational background, knowledge of historical issues and relatively similar ages. The ages of respondents in the General Public category ranges from 17 to 65 years. The poor performance of respondents in the JHS category may be attributed to their level of education, knowledge in the historical and current issue and their age.

5. Conclusions

Based on the results of the survey, it is evident that certain techniques of rendering portraits such as silhouettes and conceptual techniques in portrait illustrations do not promote easy recognition and identification of iconic personalities. It stands to reason therefore that silhouette and other conceptual techniques of portrait illustration are not ideal means of promoting recognition and identification.

The lack of publicity given to images of iconic personalities in Ghana has contributed to the inability of people to identify them from their illustrated portraits. Most people could not identify the images because they were not familiar with the physiognomy of the personalities presented for identification. The more people see images of icons they will become familiar with their physiognomy thereby leading to recognition and identification.

There is the need to encourage the use of images of iconic personalities in the production of artefacts such as postage stamps, calendars, printing and minting of currency, and on books for school children in addition to those seen on TV. The Government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education has printed the image of Kwame Nkrumah on exercise books for school children. This should not be a one-off event. It is expected that images of other personalities would also be used in a like manner as this will help promote recognition and identification of the physiognomy of iconic personalities by the younger generation and the general public as a whole.

It is important for images of iconic personalities to be given more publicity in addition to any other textual information about them.

6. Recommendations

There is the need to consciously intensify public education on the achievements of iconic personalities through the use of their portraits for diverse purposes. In this way, the public will be made aware of the physiognomies of iconic personalities. To achieve this, portraits of icons could be used on stamps, currency, textbooks for school children, hung on walls of schools and colleges, at libraries and in other public places. Again, bust and life-size statues of icons can be made and placed in public places.

Portrait illustrations of iconic personalities should be documented to serve as reference material for students and the general public.

To promote public awareness of the physiognomy of icons thereby resulting in easy identification of iconic persons, students of art and illustrators, in general, should avoid the use of silhouette and conceptual techniques in portrait illustration that are aimed at promoting recognition and identification, except in special situations.

Finally, because a sizeable proportion of Ghana's population is illiterate and cannot read and write as indicated by the 2021 population and housing census figures, there is the need to package information about iconic personalities in visual form rather than textual which could be understood by persons within this category.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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