

Home Economics and Textiles Studies  
in Malta: a curriculum history  
1960-2010

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## **Abstract**

The research examined the curriculum history of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta. Although some studies on the history of Home Economics were carried out internationally, none had yet focused on the Maltese context which presents an interesting and unique case, the islands being a former British colony with a Catholic Mediterranean culture. This study, conducted from an insider perspective, focused on the development of the micro and macro level of the curriculum of both subjects over a span of fifty years, during which many changes occurred in the Maltese social, political and economic scene. These changes, in turn, had an impact on the local educational system, which was influenced by foreign models.

The study adopted a social constructionist perspective towards the development of Home Economics and Textiles Studies, whereby it identified the influences that were most significant, and changes that took place over that particular span of time. The academic, utilitarian and pedagogical traditions were also analysed in relation to the change in status of the Home Economic and Textiles Studies curriculum.

This multi-dimensional study included life-history narratives with key individuals who played an important role in the field, semi-structured interviews with various individuals who had a link with the learning or teaching of the subjects, focus group discussions with a group of young teachers, and archival research which shed further light on what led to the changes that occurred in the curriculum over time.

The findings revealed that a number of factors led to the current status of the subjects. These included the relationship between patterns of status and resource allocation, the challenges posed by other subjects, the gendered nature of the subjects, the issues regarding name change, the development of the curriculum and role of examinations, and the career prospects of those involved in the learning and teaching of Home Economics and Textiles Studies. The research showed how and to what extent the socio-economic, political and cultural changes the Maltese islands experienced in the period under study affected both the curriculum and the subjects' community. The study also revealed that the curricula of Home Economics and Textiles Studies developed and evolved according to these various influences, which in turn had a considerable effect on their status and significance, as the subjects have traditionally been considered marginal. The analysis highlighted the impact that various government policies had on the subjects and on the teachers' lives and experiences, as well as the influence it had on their beliefs and ideals.

**KEY WORDS:** CURRICULUM HISTORY, HOME ECONOMICS, TEXTILES STUDIES, EDUCATION, LIFE-HISTORY.

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Portelli', is centered below the 'Signed:' text. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Date: June 2016

## List of Acronyms

<b>AAFCS</b>	American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences
<b>AHEA</b>	American Home Economics Association
<b>ARGDme</b>	Annual Reports of Government Departments, Ministry of Education
<b>ARwDPI</b>	Annual Report on the Working of the Department of Public Instruction
<b>D&amp;T</b>	Design and Technology
<b>DCM</b>	Department of Curriculum Management
<b>DEdC</b>	Department of Education Circular
<b>DEdF</b>	Department of Education File
<b>FGd</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GCE</b>	General Certificate of Education
<b>GMR</b>	General and Miscellaneous Report
<b>HE</b>	Home Economics
<b>HEfocus group</b>	Home Economics Focus Group
<b>HEiA</b>	Home Economics in Action
<b>HENTA</b>	Home Economics and Needlework Teachers Association
<b>HoD</b>	Head of Department
<b>ITS</b>	Institute for Tourism Studies
<b>LHi</b>	Life History Interview
<b>MATSEC</b>	Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate
<b>MC</b>	Matriculation Certificate
<b>MCAST</b>	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
<b>MDP</b>	Malta Development Plan
<b>MOOs</b>	Object Oriented Multi-User Dungeons/Domains

<b>MUDs</b>	Multi-User Dungeon/Domains
<b>NATHE</b>	National Association of Teachers of Home Economics
<b>NCF</b>	National Curriculum Framework
<b>NFCS</b>	Nutrition, Family and Consumer Studies
<b>NMC</b>	National Minimum Curriculum
<b>PSD</b>	Personal and Social Development
<b>RwDE</b>	Report on the Working of the Department of Education
<b>RwGD</b>	Report on the Working of Government Departments
<b>SEC</b>	Secondary Education Certificate
<b>SSi</b>	Semi-structured Interview
<b>T&amp;D</b>	Textiles and Design
<b>TS</b>	Textiles Studies
<b>TSfocus group</b>	Textiles Studies Focus Group
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>ULSEB</b>	University of London School Examination Board

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Thesis background

#### 1.1.1 The international scenario

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Home Economics and Textiles Studies evolved as school subjects in many countries under various names. The terms used for various domestic subjects changed throughout the years and was mainly influenced by the historical, political, social and economic situations of particular countries.<sup>1</sup> In the US, as early as 1902, ‘Home Economics’ was the term chosen to incorporate all the areas related to domestic subjects, while in Britain and her colonies, the terms adopted varied from ‘Domestic Economy’ and ‘Domestic Science’ to ‘Housecraft’ and later to ‘Home Economics’. Although considered as one of the domestic subjects in Britain, Needlework mostly remained a separate discipline. It was considered as the ‘mother of the domestic arts’, especially as it was the first subject to be included in the school curriculum for girls (Yoxall, 1965, p. 7).

Throughout the evolution of Home Economics, several attempts were made to provide a clear and focused definition for the discipline in order to move away from its original domestic connotation which gave laypersons a negative impression of the field. However, its multi-disciplinary nature proved to be a major obstacle in providing a single definition which the members of the community could agree upon. The lack of specificity is due to the fact that the discipline draws knowledge from other disciplines and hence it is not conducive to a clear identification of its domain boundaries. This situation created a sense of insecurity among home economists (Pendergast, 2001), who for a long time have been struggling with an identity crisis, desperately in search for identity and status. Throughout the subject’s curriculum history, the link of its content with female-centred domesticity reduced its value as a legitimate field of knowledge. During the 1950s and 1960s, some feminists were against the teaching of domestic subjects, especially Home Economics in Britain and the US, as they argued

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, the term ‘domestic subjects’ shall be used as a generic term to refer to a group of subjects which were traditionally taught to females, such as Housecraft, Cookery, Domestic Economy, Needlework, Laundry work, Housewifery, etc.

that instead of empowering women, the subject's content reinforced the traditional roles of females in society (Attar, 1990).

Throughout the past decades, various introspective analyses about the philosophy and nature of Home Economics have been conducted by professionals in the field (Brown and Paolucci, 1979; Brown and Baldwin, 1995) in order to steer the discipline away from its long-time insecurity, and to enhance its legitimation and status. Nonetheless, the struggles for survival that had to be endured by domestic subjects is evident in their history, as they survived for more than a century in many schools, colleges and universities in several countries. Where the battle was lost, due to lack of influence and resources, the subject area itself, courses, departments and experts in the field were permanently forced out of the curriculum (Pendergast, 2001).

### **1.1.2 The Maltese experience**

The evolution of domestic subjects in Malta has been mainly similar to that in Britain, due to the fact that the island is a former British colony.<sup>2</sup> It was only during these past few decades that the subjects' evolutionary trajectory changed according to Malta's political, social and cultural developments. Most changes and developments that occurred in the British educational system were experienced in Malta after some time. The British curricula of domestic subjects had a direct impact on their local counterparts, which were only slightly modified to reflect local conditions. The British influence may be clearly seen in the names given to the different domestic subjects, the pedagogies used, the curriculum content, examinations and teacher training.

By the mid-1850s, Needlework was the first domestic subject to be included in the curriculum of the girls' primary schools in Malta. It was followed by other related subjects as a measure intended to improve the social and health conditions of the local population (Portelli, 2009). The teaching of domestic subjects flourished with the establishment of the Housecraft School in the 1930s and the availability of Housecraft lessons for the senior girls of primary school. The dominant patriarchal ideology and strong Catholic values which prevailed in Maltese society proved beneficial in

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<sup>2</sup> The various terms given to 'Home Economics' and 'Textiles Studies' in Malta, including Domestic Economy/Domestic Science/Domestic Studies/Housecraft and Needlework/Needlecraft, shall be referred to according to the name given under which they went at that particular point in time.



promoting Housecraft and Needlework in primary and secondary schools. Although this ideological stance gave a boost to the subjects, it greatly reinforced the traditional, domestic and stereotypical image of the subjects. It also emphasised the utilitarian and practical aspects of the subjects, effectively hampering their efforts in later years to improve their status as academic disciplines.

Over the years, the curricula of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta experienced many changes which had substantial influence on their status and significance. There were times when the subjects enjoyed popularity among parents, students and the education authorities. The teaching of domestic subjects between the 1930s and the 1960s proved to be a boost for the status of these disciplines. By the end of the 1960s, Housecraft and Needlework were taught to girls in the primary, grammar and secondary technical schools. At the time, the widespread teaching of these subjects had the support of the education authorities who believed that the teaching of these disciplines was important for girls' education. However, with the introduction of compulsory secondary education in the early 1970s, Housecraft/Home Economics was no longer taught in primary schools, and Needlework lessons only remained on the curriculum for another decade until they were abolished. From then on the subjects were mainly taught in secondary schools where their importance varied according to the government's educational policy changes.

Today, Home Economics and Textiles Studies struggle to keep a strong foothold in the Maltese curriculum due to competition from an increasing number of other subjects that have been introduced in recent years and that compete for a place in the secondary school timetable. However, with the increase of health-related concerns in today's society, the practical and utilitarian aspects of Home Economics are regaining importance and strengthening the subject's claim for a place on the curriculum. In recent years, a number of policies were implemented in schools related to the well-being of students, and Home Economics featured as one of the subjects that can address health-related concerns. Textiles Studies, however, seems to be a doomed subject as it will no longer form part of the secondary school curriculum, and will eventually be replaced by a vocational subject related to fashion. The long legacy of Textiles Studies as the first domestic subject to be introduced for girls in schools shall remain just a memory for those past students who studied it at school.

## **1.2 An insider perspective**

Home Economics and Textiles Studies have been a prominent part of my academic life since my secondary school days back in 1978. I became very passionate about the subjects from the start, and chose them as options at secondary school years and at Sixth Form. Although Home Economics and Needlework, as Textiles Studies was called back then, were considered mostly suitable for low achieving girls and were poorly considered by many teachers, I furthered my studies in these subjects by reading for a Bachelors and a Masters degree in Education at the University of Malta.

Throughout these years, I was positively influenced and encouraged by many people, especially several Home Economics and Needlework teachers. Their enthusiasm inspired me to pursue a teaching career in these subjects. Being a teacher of subjects that are constantly struggling and striving for identity spurred me on to involve myself further in matters related to the disciplines. My involvement in curriculum design and development and as a national examination paper setter at various levels not only gave me valuable experience, but also provided me with a deeper insight of the subjects from a wider perspective than that of teaching. Moreover, as an active member of the subjects' association for a number of years I obtained first-hand knowledge of my colleagues' perspectives on various issues related to the subjects, and of the efforts made to enhance the profile of the disciplines. I also experienced and witnessed several significant and historical moments concerning the development of the subjects. My role as a teacher and an academic saw me directly involved in various challenges, such as the struggle to defend the status of the subjects, tussles for more resources with the education authorities, and the constant need to convince others about the legitimacy of the subjects' curricula.

My full immersion as a member of the subjects' community for nearly 37 years also gave me the opportunity to reflect about the historical developments of the disciplines from an insider perspective. This required a detailed study of the subjects' local curriculum history within a broader context. This included both a comparative analysis of what happened in other countries, especially the USA and Britain, and a consideration of the Maltese historical, political, economic and social developments that played a part in the evolution of the subjects' curriculum history. My role as an insider and the autoethnographic approach, which shall be fully discussed in the

methodology section, is an important aspect of this study. It adds to the evidence provided by the narratives of the participants of the research, and was triangulated with archival documents in order to provide a clear perspective on the issues under discussion.

### **1.3 The investigation**

This research set out to examine the curriculum history of two particular school subjects in Malta, namely Home Economics and Textiles Studies, from 1960 to 2010. It constitutes a chronological continuation of an investigation I had done for my Masters degree on the initial establishment of the subjects in the Maltese education system. The focus of this study is on the evolution of the Home Economics and Textiles Studies curricula over a span of fifty years, a period when several changes took place on the Maltese socio-political scene. In those years, Malta voted against integration with Britain (1958), obtained independence (1964), became a republic (1974) then a member of the European Union (2004), and restructured its economy before adopting the Euro (2008). These changes inevitably had an impact on the local education scenario. In fact, although the influence of foreign educational systems remained strong, various governments sought to introduce localisation policies in order to address the specific educational needs of the nation. This in turn had a considerable effect on the status and significance of Home Economics and Textiles Studies.

The investigation posed various questions. How and why have Home Economics and Textiles Studies evolved in the Maltese school curriculum in this way? What influenced their status as school subjects? Which social, economic and political events, both locally and abroad, created a major impact on the curriculum of these subjects? To what extent does the past influence the present image and status of the subjects? What was the impact of the status of these subjects on the teachers? How did the teachers react to the various changes made to the curriculum?

### **1.4 The research question**

In this study, I adopted a social constructionist perspective in order to explore these questions and investigate the curriculum history of the subjects. The theoretical framework used for this study included Goodson's theories on the social construction

of school subjects (1983; 1992b; 1994; 1998), Layton's model (1972) on the different stages of evolution of secondary school subjects and the concept of refraction in education developed by Goodson and Rudd (2012). This theoretical framework provided the lines of inquiry which were applied and used where necessary during this study. The approach was autoethnographic deploying a variety of methods to facilitate data collection. The data were examined in the light of this framework which was intended to illuminate the data analysis and not to prove a particular theory. This framework enabled me to employ the research paradigm and methodological techniques most pertinent to answer the main research question. I utilised the qualitative paradigm for this study and adopted a broadly historical approach with regard to the development of school subjects. I also made use of a blend of methodologies such as archival research, life history narratives and autoethnography.

I embarked on a multi-dimensional analysis that combines the experiences of the teachers who are the first to encounter the curriculum, with the structures that serve as a foundation to construct the curriculum (Goodson, 1994). Such an analysis was used to answer the main research question:

*How have Home Economics and Textiles Studies been socially constructed from 1960 to 2010?*

In order to answer the research question, the following secondary questions were also necessary for this study were: *What factors influenced their status and significance, i.e., material interests? What are the evolving visions and values of these subjects, i.e., ideal interests? How has the balance between material and ideal interests changed over the period under study?*

The theoretical perspectives I adopted enabled me to take the 'middle ground' as metaphorically suggested by Goodson (1994). This study located the middle-ground between the policies that structure the curriculum and the realities that take place within the classroom. A focus on the 'middle ground' allows for an investigation of the lives of teachers who experienced both ends of the continuum (Goodson, 1994). The study also addressed the historical context in order to highlight the micro and macro influences that had an impact on the development of the curriculum of these subjects.

## **1.5 Research data**

My research data for this thesis was mostly collected from two primary sources, archival documents and life history/semi-structured interviews. The archival documents include official and unofficial documents located at the National Archives of Malta, the Ministry of Education and the University of Malta. I accessed additional archives, such as those of the Home Economics and Needlework Teachers Association (HENTA) and the Nutrition, Family and Consumer Studies (NFCS) office. I also conducted a series of life history and semi-structured interviews for this investigation. The life history interviews involved past key players in the field, whereas the semi-structured interviews focused on individuals who still have an active role in the teaching of the subjects. Besides these interviews, additional data was also obtained from online focus group discussions with young, less experienced teachers and non-participant observations in schools where the main focus was the natural setting of the Home Economics and Textiles Studies laboratories.

## 1.6 A route map

This study consists of the following chapters shown in the table below:

DESCRIPTION OF CHAPTERS
<b>Chapter 1</b> introduces the research while presenting the theoretical framework and the research question. It also provides the backdrop to the specific issues discussed in the study.
<b>Chapter 2</b> presents a historical overview of the educational system in Malta from 1960 to the present, with references to specific policies that were introduced by the various governments, highlighting the important changes that took place in the education sector and their impact on the evolution of Home Economics and Textiles Studies.
<b>Chapter 3</b> provides an overview of the historical evolution of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta, with reference to the local and international literature. The first part focuses on the development of the curriculum history of the subjects in Malta from 1960 to 2010. In the second part are discussed the major themes emerging from international studies that were relevant for the analysis of the Maltese scenario. A timeline of events is also included for easy reference.
<b>Chapter 4</b> focuses on the literature pertaining to the social constructionist perspective in curriculum research. It also deals with Goodson's theories on the development of school subjects (1983; 1992b; 1994; 1998), the concept of refraction as used in education by Goodson and Rudd (2012) and Layton's model (1972) on the evolution of school subjects.
<b>Chapter 5</b> provides a discussion of the multi-method approach that was used to gather the relevant data for this research. It highlights the reasons for choosing an autoethnographic, qualitative approach, and the issues concerning the role of the insider, together with its ethical implications. The chapter also includes a detailed description of the procedures used to recruit participants, the ethical considerations concerning the data collection process, and the way the data was sorted and catalogued for easy access.
<b>Chapter 6</b> focuses on the evolution of the status of Home Economics and Textiles Studies as school subjects. It describes how the subject's community struggled to enhance the subject's academic status by developing a scientific body of knowledge. The chapter also deals with the relationship between status and resource allocation, with particular reference to its implications for Home Economics and Textiles Studies as practical subjects.
<b>Chapter 7</b> provides an analysis of the relationship between the evolution of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta, and gender issues in the patriarchal society of the Mediterranean island. It presents a critical account of how gender issues evolved through the years leading to Home Economics being offered as a subject option to boys. The chapter also delves into the impact of males on the subject's community that has been traditionally dominated by females.

**Table 1.1:** A description of each chapter.

(Table continues on the following page)

DESCRIPTION	(cont. ...)
<p><b>Chapter 8</b> discusses the struggle to provide a clear definition of domestic subjects, highlighting the underlying concerns of the subjects' community regarding status, image, public perception and the subjects' identity.</p>	
<p><b>Chapter 9</b> discusses the development of the syllabi of Home Economics and Textiles Studies from 1960 to 2010. The analysis illustrates the strong British influence on the subjects' syllabi, and how the practical components of the subjects, which were the main focus of the syllabi for many decades, experienced a gradual decline, leading to a new emphasis on decision-making and problem-solving skills. The introduction of new pedagogies and assessment procedures in the syllabi of both subjects, is also taken into account.</p>	
<p><b>Chapter 10</b> aims to answer the research question set at the beginning of the study. It includes a comparison between Layton's model on the evolution of school subjects and Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta, and discusses the forces that influenced the social construction of the subjects. Reference is also made to the concept of refraction in education. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the issue of the changing patterns of development of the subjects' curricula in terms of the relationship between the material and ideal interests of the key players in the study.</p>	
<p><b>Chapter 11</b> consists of a brief conclusion to the study. It re-states the research question, the theoretical framework used, the limitations of the study, the original contribution to knowledge, and some final considerations on the findings.</p>	

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT – EDUCATION IN MALTA**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides a brief overview of the history of education in Malta, in order to allow a better understanding of the circumstances in which certain changes occurred and the impact they had on the development of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta. It covers a period of fifty years, from 1960 to 2010, highlighting specific policies introduced by various governments over thirteen legislatures.

#### **2.1 The education of Maltese children prior to 1960 - Elementary and secondary schooling**

The post-war era in Malta was a difficult time for the island's economy. Malta had just played a very significant role as a British colony during the Second World War. The education of the young had necessarily been neglected during that difficult time. Consequently, that period was very challenging for Maltese society. At the time, the local government considered education as one of the key factors which could have had an impact on the island's economy. The establishment of compulsory elementary education for all and the setting up of proper technical education were two challenges faced by the government of the time. In fact, both were implemented by 1960 as part of the island's first industrialisation programme. Industrialisation was top on the government's agenda, so apart from attracting foreign companies to establish their manufacturing activities in Malta, the authorities focused on training people in the skills mostly required by the companies. A skillful workforce was one of the pre-requisites for the improvement of the island's economy.

In the late 1950s, primary education was compulsory for children from 6 to 14 years of age. The government constructed new schools and repaired other in various localities across the Island. The first two years of schooling, stages 1 and 2, were spent in the infants' school which was co-educational. In the remaining years, from standards 1 to 6, the students were segregated by sex and attended the senior section of the school. The students who succeeded in finishing their primary education continued to secondary school.



Prior to 1959, students between 10 to 13 years of age or older could sit for a competitive and selective entrance examination, and if successful they could proceed to the secondary schools. In Malta, there were three grammar schools for girls and a lyceum for boys. Students spent five years in the secondary school and these schools prepared their students for the Ordinary level of the Oxford General Certificate of Education (GCE) in the above mentioned subjects.

By 1959, two Secondary Technical schools were also established; one to cater for boys and another one for girls. Originally, these schools were intended to provide a three-year programme on general education with a technical and vocational bias. However these schools ended up offering a five-year secondary education and the academic bias of the curriculum was still clearly predominant.

Besides government schools, there were a number of schools run by independent organisations or religious orders. By 1961, they provided education for 19,000 children (DEdF, No. 850/62, Report on schooling available in Malta and Gozo, p. 2) in the elementary and secondary sector. The male and female Catholic religious orders catered for the majority number of students attending in non-government schools.

## **2.2 Education beyond 1960 - meeting the needs of the Island**

In 1959, the Maltese Government enacted a national Development Plan for the period 1959-1964 (MDP 1959-64). Education featured prominently in two aspects, as a general educational programme and as a contributory factor to the development of economic growth. Vocational and technical education became a top priority for the government, as after gaining independence in 1964, it had to change its dependency on employment of the Maltese with the British Armed Forces to an economy based on industrial production and tourism.

The change in government administration in 1961 brought about several reforms in the Maltese education system. Courses held at the Secondary Technical Schools were extended up to five years, this leading to the foreign GCE examinations, as was the case in the Lyceum and the Girls' Grammar Schools (RwDE 1963). The newly elected Nationalist Party wanted to keep in line with the national Development Plan of 1959 laid out by the previous administration, in order to affirm the importance of technical and vocational education.

During the mid-1960s, with the aid from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the government established new courses of a practical nature, in various schools, for students who did not wish to continue secondary education or who failed to obtain a place in the grammar or technical schools by the time they reached 13 years of age. These so called 'Extended Courses', were similar to those that were well established in the UK, and provided students with practical experience in various fields of study (DEdF, No. 2152/65; RwDE 1967).

Another important change that occurred during the 1960s in the field of education, for students who had an inclination for trades and had finished compulsory schooling, was the expansion of the technical and vocational courses. A Technical Institute, similar to the College for Further Education found in Britain at the time, was established in Paola. This housed several courses that were previously provided by other technical schools (Zammit Mangion, 1992).

Upon leaving secondary school, those students who obtained their GCE qualifications and wanted to further their education could opt to attend the Government Sixth Form, where they could follow courses that led to Advanced level, and then follow a degree course at the University of Malta, go to the Teachers' Training College or find employment.

The granting of Independence to Malta by the British in 1964, by which Malta became a sovereign state, had a general positive impact on Maltese society. The Maltese people started once again to appreciate all that was local, including art, literature and cultural traditions which were for decades undervalued, as preference was previously given to anything that was British. In the educational sphere, there were almost no significant changes in the school curricula, syllabus or text books (Zammit Mangion, 1992).

### **2.3 The turbulent 1970s and secondary education for all**

In October 1970, the government undertook a massive reform in education by introducing a new policy to provide secondary education for all. This innovation was considered as a milestone for the Maltese and education in Malta. It was intended to grant equal opportunities to pupils of different social classes (Zammit Mangion, 1992).

Following the introduction of secondary education for all in 1973, the 11+ entrance examination for admission into secondary schools and all forms of testing were abolished (RwGD July 1973 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 1974). This resulted in a situation whereby students proceeded automatically to the new area secondary schools which catered for all abilities. From 1972 to 1974, a new system of continuous assessment and setting were introduced in government schools, whereby students progressed from one level to another, without sitting for the end-of-year examinations (RwGD April 1973 to August 1974; RwGD July 1973 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1974).

Just like the other schools, the new secondary schools were not co-educational. Common courses were established during the initial years of secondary schooling in order to provide a number of subject options at different levels within the same school and students could move from one school to another without any difficulty (MDP 1973-79). This drastic shift in policy from a highly selective system of education to a comprehensive one entailed considerable planning from various aspects. The Department of Education required more teachers in the secondary sector, and a considerable number of modifications were necessary for most of the existing schools (Zammit Mangion, 1992).

Once elected in power in 1971, the Labour Party wanted to implement what had been planned for a number of years after the attainment of political independence, namely economic independence (DEdF, No. 416/72). In order to achieve this, it was imperative for the government to strengthen technical and vocational education in order to provide the workforce with skills that would be suitable for employment in industry. The first trade school for boys was established in 1972, and by 1974 the number increased to eight (RwGD April 1973 – August 1974; Sultana, 1992). It was only a year later that a trade school for girls was opened. These schools were eventually closed down in 2001, as part of the government reform in technical and vocational education (Ministry of Education, 2001).

In October 1973, the Government set up the Malta College of Education which included the amalgamation of the two teacher training Colleges, the Mater Admirabilis Training College for Women Teachers and St Michael's Training College for Men. All the students were brought together in one new non-residential college, on the premises previously used by St. Michael's Training College (RwGD April 1973 to

August 1974; July 1973 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1974). This change brought about the recruitment of new staff and the introduction of a new one-year course was introduced for graduate students. Then in 1974, the Department of Educational Studies at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) took over the College of Education and continued with its work until the Faculty of Education was established at the University of Malta in 1978 (Zammit Mangion, 1992).

The Education Act of 1974 brought several changes to the Maltese educational system. In particular, it gave the Minister of Education power over schooling in both government and private schools. This centralisation was extended also to the curriculum, subject syllabi and examinations in Government Schools. In addition, the school-leaving age was raised from fourteen to sixteen years and compulsory education came into force, thus bringing Malta in line with other European countries (DEdC No. 6/74, Legal Notice, No.3 of 1974).

In 1978, the university system was drastically changed, leading to the establishment of the New University to replace the former institution (Zammit Mangion, 1992). As part of the new set-up, a student-worker scheme, whereby students could enrol through sponsorship by an employer. The system was based on six months' work and six months study. Entry to the University was not hampered by family background or lack of financial means but places were available according to the needs of the country through the introduction of closed numbers. The newly established Faculty of Education provided a degree course in teaching (Bachelor of Arts in Education) and offered several areas of specialisation.

The Education Department wanted to replicate what had been done at University to the Government Sixth Form, renamed New Lyceum. It introduced a pupil-worker scheme similar to the student-worker scheme.

In 1979, a major reform occurred in the upper forms of the secondary schools. All Form III students were divided into two groups; Group 1 consisted of motivated students who wished to follow an academic curriculum leading to 'O' level and eventually to 'A' level courses. Group 2 comprised those students who were unmotivated or were not aspiring to sit for GCEs at the end of their fifth year (RwGD April – December 1979).

## **2.4 The education reforms of the 1980s**

### **2.4.1 The tripartite system and additional changes to education**

The type of education system that the Labour Government chose to adopt was problematic, especially regarding the educational performance of students. In 1981, the government abandoned comprehensive schooling and went back to a tiered educational system, which once again differentiated students according to ability, by establishing junior lyceums (RwGD 1981). These academic and elite government secondary schools, initially one for boys and another one for girls, were established to cater for students from Group 1 in the secondary school. Those who wanted to proceed to the junior lyceums had to pass a competitive national examination. The aim of the government was to ‘provide accelerated education for students with high intellectual and academic abilities’ (RwGD 1981, p. 1).

In 1985, Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School was set up within the same premises of the New Lyceum. It catered specifically for students who had no wish to proceed to University or who did not possess the required entry qualifications for the New Lyceum (Zammit Mangion, 1992). It offered courses in Home Economics and Needlework at Ordinary and Advanced level and joint classes for Advanced level with the New Lyceum students.

In 1987, there was a change of Government and the Nationalist Party, which had been in opposition for three consecutive legislatures, started working on reforming the education system. After a few months in office, the government’s initial work was to tackle the higher education sector. The entry regulations of the University were changed and all those students who had the necessary qualifications were admitted. The government also removed the worker-student scheme which had been introduced by the previous administration in 1978. The government strove to bring back the traditional functions of the University by re-introducing post-graduate course and research. University once again acquired its administrative, financial and academic autonomy. Reforms also took place in the government Sixth Form, the New Lyceum, where the pupil-worker scheme was also abolished and all those who had the necessary entry requirements, especially the students from private Sixth Forms who had been excluded from the pupil-worker scheme, were eligible for a stipend.

### **2.4.2 The Education Act (1988) and the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC)**

The Education Act of 1988 was another significant development in the history of Maltese education. Its aim was that the Department of Education provide ‘an effective and efficient system of schooling’ and training in areas that address the needs of society (RwGD 1989, p. 63). This Act also emphasised the obligation of society to ensure that each individual develop his/her competencies in order to contribute the development of the country. This reflected the new policy of the government to motivate students to keep on studying after leaving secondary school. The Education Act also established a new definition of the different types of schools available in Malta. The government schools were now referred to as ‘state schools’, whereas Church and independent schools, which had been previously collectively known as ‘private schools’, became known as ‘non-state schools’.<sup>3</sup> The change in nomenclature, from ‘government’ schools to ‘state’ schools, reflected the significant change of Government policy which shifted from a centralised to a decentralised school administration system.

Another change brought about by the Education Act of 1988 was the compulsory school age. Parents were duty-bound to register their children in a school when their offspring reached five years of age. Therefore, compulsory schooling started at the age of five and ended once the child reached his or her sixteenth birthday. This also meant that compulsory schooling was full-time and free for children in all state schools.

The Education Act (1988) also improved the teachers’ professional status by requesting that every individual who was employed or to be employed as a teacher had to obtain a teachers’ warrant, either temporary or permanent, depending on the type of qualifications obtained, and was to receive remuneration accordingly.

When the Nationalist government took office in 1987, the curriculum was very limited and restricted. Therefore, in 1989, a NMC for primary schools was introduced and a syllabus was prepared to reflect the rationale of the new curriculum.

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<sup>3</sup> As a result of this change in the Education Act, a number of independent schools run by the Parents Foundation for Education were established in the following years with the aim to cater for those parents who wished to provide a different type of education to their children.

## **2.5 The 1990s**

### **2.5.1 Further reforms in education**

The National Minimum Curriculum Regulations of 1990 established according to the Education Act of 1988 brought about huge changes in the Maltese education system, although changes had already started being implemented in the curriculum for secondary school students.

The first revised syllabi for secondary school subjects were launched in September 1991, when extensive changes were made in order to be in line with the new NMC for secondary schools. Separate ones were made for the more able students, those at the junior lyceums, and for the less academically inclined students at the area secondary schools (RwGD 1991; 1992).

During the following year, in 1992, the Education Directorate started to implement a ‘verticalization’ process to streamline all general secondary education and as a result make the necessary reform in the trade schools sector (RwGD 1992, p. 54). Some schools were closed down and others were established to cater for these types of students. However, this eventually led to the complete phasing out of the boys’ and girls’ trade schools in October 2001.

In the following years, a number of committees were set up to focus on ways how to improve local education. When a change in government took place in October 1996, the Education Department was restructured as a Division.<sup>4</sup> One of its aims was to improve the general level of education, hence a Steering Committee was set up to organise a review of the National Minimum Curricula by conducting and analysing research to presented to the Minister of Education by 1998 (RwGD 1996). As part of the new strategy, a new department for Curriculum Development, Implementation and Review was established in 1997 leading to the initial formulation of a new NMC draft document in March 1998 (RwGD 1997).

In September 1998, the Labour government’s legislature came to an abrupt end and the result of an early election saw the Nationalist Party back into power after only 22 months in opposition. The new administration kept the focus on implementing the

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<sup>4</sup> Henceforth, the Education Department shall be referred to as the Education Division.

changes that were already in progress. The new NMC draft document was finalised and became the new NMC (Ministry of Education, 2000) after consultation with the major stakeholders in the field of education in December 1999.

### **2.5.2 Reforms in the Examination System – from foreign to local examinations**

In 1995, a new system of examination, the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) aimed at 16 year old students, and the Matriculation Certificate (MC) examinations catering for post-secondary students, was officially adopted on a national level. The Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Board was set up in 1989, to replace the GCEs offered by foreign examination boards. As from 1997, with this new format of examinations, entry requirements to University, changed from three subjects at Advanced level, to two subjects at Advanced and three subjects at Intermediate level (RwGD 1994). This system of examination intended as a move from its British counterpart to a model similar to the International Baccalaureate. Along the years, although several recommendations have been made by assessment experts to modify or completely replace the MC system of examination; little or no changes were put into effect.

## **2.6 The start of the millennium and the implementation of the NMC**

At the turn of the century, the government set out a five-year plan to implement the NMC, which came into effect as from the scholastic year 2000/2001 (Ministry of Education, 2001). In the following years, the Education Division organised various staff development programmes as part of the NMC implementation process. Also, the various syllabi were reviewed to reflect the principles and methodologies promoted by the new NMC (ARGDme 2000).

The implementation of the NMC had its focus on the provision of good quality education for all. Three important features of the NMC were the establishment of a National Curriculum Council in March 2001, which had to monitor and evaluate schools, research and review the NMC, the decentralisation of the state schooling system and the consolidation of the School Development Plan.<sup>5</sup> The implementation of the NMC was a major challenge for all stakeholders in the different educational

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<sup>5</sup> The decentralisation process in state schools was already in progress at school management level for a number of years. As from scholastic year 1997/98, every secondary school was already drafting and implementing its own school development plan.



sectors, as it involved a whole restructuring process within the Maltese educational system (Bezzina, 2003).

The initial stage in this reform was to amend Chapter 327 of the Education Act, in 2006, referred to *The Education (Amendment) Act 2006*. This included the restructuring of the Education Division and the setting up of ten school Colleges. Hence, in November 2007, the former Education Division was split into two Directorates, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education and the Directorate for Educational Services.<sup>6</sup> A school network of Colleges, which was initially started as a pilot project in 2005/2006 (ARGDme 2006), was completed and implemented by 2007.<sup>7</sup>

The policy document *For All Children to Succeed* (Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2005) highlighted one of the main problems that existed in our education system, namely the abrupt transition of students from the primary to secondary schooling. The document, *Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Malta: A Review* (Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, 2008), was published in 2007 and updated in 2008, and included a number of recommendations in order to pave the way for a reform in the primary and secondary sector. This reform, which was launched in November 2009, included a different approach to education. Two key recommendations were related to assessment in the primary years which included the elimination of the 11+ examination and the introduction of benchmarking in the final year of primary school. In the secondary sector, it was recommended that a curriculum evaluation exercise be conducted in order for the secondary school system to be in line with the changes in the primary sector, resulting in the removal of streaming and the creation of setting in certain core areas of studies. It was also recommended that during the first two years of secondary school, students study core subjects together with a choice of a variety of optional subjects. Then in Form III, a number of vocational subjects were to be introduced in the curriculum. It was envisaged that through the implementation of these measures, there would be an increase in the number of successful students by the end of secondary school. The implementation of several recommendations, especially those related to assessment, took place as from scholastic

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<sup>6</sup> Henceforth the Education Division shall be referred to as the Education Directorate.

<sup>7</sup> Each College, under the responsibility of a College Principal, included a number of kindergarten, primary, and girls' and boys' secondary schools.

year 2011-2012. Also, during the same scholastic year, the Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family introduced vocational subjects as a pilot project conducted over two years in a number of state, Church and independent schools (Department of Information, 2010).<sup>8</sup> These subjects were to follow on the same lines as the (Business and Technology) BTEC programmes and were to be assessed by members of the same examination Board. The subjects included Engineering, Health and Social Care, Hospitality and I.T.

Also, in January 2008, a review of the NMC was launched on a national scale involving all stakeholders, eventually leading to the drafting of a document entitled *A National Curriculum Framework for All* (NCF) (Ministry of Education and Employment, December 2012). One of the key aims of the NCF, which was implemented as from September 2013, was to prepare students to acquire the necessary competencies to help them become lifelong learners, responsible citizens and to find employment. The latter aspect was a significant innovation, since it had been given less importance in previous policy documents. In addition, it sought to address a number of other issues, mainly for the provision of the necessary flexibility for schools to create learning programmes which target the needs of their particular students.

Finally, during the past decade, numerous educational reforms were carried out which involved rapid transition in the working practices of all stakeholders in the field. New modern user-friendly schools were built and others had extensive refurbishment to be able to provide a stimulating learning environment. Administrators and teachers in schools had to keep up with the evolving transformations in the education system in order to accomplish the targets set by the Education Directorate.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

Awareness of the social, economic and political context is crucial in order to understand the significance and the implications of the developments in the Maltese education system, in the decades under study. It helps to appreciate the perspectives of the participants in the study, whose professional and, in some cases, personal life was affected by the events mentioned above.

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<sup>8</sup> The areas of responsibility of the Ministry of Education changed several times over the years, depending on the policies of the government of the time.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **AN OVERVIEW OF THE EVOLUTION OF HOME ECONOMICS AND TEXTILES STUDIES**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter illustrates the historical evolution of Home Economics and Textiles Studies, based on the local and international literature consulted for this study. The first part, which focuses on the development of the curriculum history of the subjects in Malta from 1960 to 2010, is mostly based on archival sources. The second part discusses the major themes emerging from international studies that were relevant for the analysis of the Maltese scenario.

#### **Part 1 – Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta – a historical overview**

##### **3.1 Domestic subjects in the elementary/primary and secondary schools prior to 1960**

In Malta, Home Economics and Textiles Studies as school subjects have a very long history dating back to the mid-1800s (Portelli, 1996; 2009). Needlework was the first of the two subjects to be included in the curriculum of the elementary schools. This reflected what happened in Britain, where Needlework was identified as ‘the oldest domestic subject’ (Sillitoe, 1966, p. 186). Less prominence was given to Domestic Economy and themes related to health and hygiene, as these featured in a weekly subject called ‘Object lessons’ (Portelli, 1996). It was only after a number of years that Domestic Science was included as a subject in its own right on the elementary school timetable. This was influenced by what was taking place in other countries, especially Britain (Yoxall, 1965; Sillitoe, 1966) and America (Stage and Vincenti, 1997), and by the social and health conditions of the Maltese.<sup>9</sup>

The earliest evidence of the teaching of Domestic Economy in Maltese secondary schools goes back to the 1920s, when the subject formed part of the curriculum of female students in their final year. It was also one of the subjects included in the

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<sup>9</sup> The education system of the United Kingdom served as a model for many countries, especially its former colonies. The British Home Economics curriculum was adopted and adapted by Nordic and Baltic countries (Benn, 2000), Hong Kong (Yung Chan, 2005), South Africa and Zimbabwe (Chamisa, 2005).

programme of studies of the Central School in 1921 (Portelli, 1996). By 1937, the subject was studied by a limited number of classes at the Government secondary schools (RwDE 37-38). As shown below, data confirms that despite the fact that students held Domestic Science in low esteem, the education authorities strove to improve the status of the subject to raise its profile and entice girls in the secondary schools to opt for it.

### The teaching of Housecraft at the Central Housecraft School

During the 1930s, the Education Department established two Central Housecraft Schools on the Islands, one in Floriana, in 1931, and another in Victoria, Gozo in 1937. The setting up of a Housecraft School and the teaching of the subject in girls' schools was deemed by the authorities to be a priority in order to resolve the lack of domestic bias in girls' education (RwGD 1930-31).<sup>10</sup> Their aim for the teaching of domestic subjects was that by drawing the interest of female students towards the subjects, they would also have a direct link to the parents. It was perceived that, to a certain extent, it was more important that the parents themselves acquired such knowledge. Moreover, the work conducted by the staff of the Housecraft School, would facilitate an improvement of the quality of life of the Maltese and lay the foundations for good hygiene practices (RwDE 38-39). According to the Education Department, the aim behind the Model House was 'to set the pace going'. All the schools were to try to follow the syllabus of the Housecraft School 'as far as apparatus, furniture and other circumstances (such an environment) permit' (RwGD 1934-35, p. 52). The setting up of the Housecraft Schools effectively kicked-off the widespread teaching of domestic subjects in Malta and Gozo.

The curriculum of the Housecraft School was based on domestic subjects. The courses offered were mainly practical in nature and included Housekeeping, Cooking and Table Manners. Another two courses, Home-nursing and Babycraft were entrusted to a female School Medical Officer who delivered the lectures daily in the afternoon. Later, Laundry Work also formed part of the school curriculum. Senior girls of the elementary schools could visit on a rotation basis, once weekly or fortnightly, depending on the number of requests received. The lessons followed by the students

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<sup>10</sup> The Housecraft School was referred to as a 'Model House', similar to the ones found in Britain at the time (RwGD 1934-35).

at the Housecraft School were complemented with further work done at their respective schools. The students were taught aspects of nutrition through planning, preparing and cooking simple dishes.

By 1937, the school changed its focus by extending its services beyond those aimed at primary school children. During the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, Domestic Science rooms were set up in the larger primary schools in order to carry out practical work (RwDE 1948-54). During the 1950s, modifications were made to the Housecraft School courses, namely Cookery, Household Management, Laundry Work and Personal and Domestic Hygiene. This followed the introduction of a new syllabus for the teaching of Housecraft and Domestic Science, including Needlework, in the primary school, which focused more on the practical nature of the subjects (RwDE 1955-56).

In the following years, the students' attendance at the Housecraft Schools in Malta and Gozo increased considerably. However, by 1964, the system was revised and the school visits were only limited to 13- and 14-year old girls who took Housecraft lessons at the primary school. This was done so as to give these senior students the opportunity to attend at least three times during their last year and conduct some practical work in the kitchen, in the use of the 'flat' and in the laundry (RwDE 1964).

### **3.2 Housecraft and Needlework during the 1960s**

By 1962, Housecraft was compulsory in the girls' primary school curriculum. Slow progress was maintained in the acquisition of enough resources and space in these schools for the teaching of the subject. As from 1963, all the newly constructed primary schools had at least a Domestic Science room, despite lacking adequate quantities of the necessary equipment (RwDE 1963). A great difference was made when UNICEF donated a number of large equipment, such as cookers, to be used exclusively during Housecraft lessons.

The teaching of Housecraft in primary schools was carried out in conjunction with the teaching of the subject at the Housecraft School. The course of study was grouped into units and focused on different aspects, including nutrition, home management, child care, personal relationships, family health and safety. The teachers taught the subject through projects.

### **3.2.1 The role of Housecraft and Needlework in the ‘practical’ classes, the extended courses and primary education**

During the early 1960s, the senior students of the primary schools who intended to leave school at the end of the scholastic year were placed in ‘practical’ classes. Housecraft featured prominently in the curriculum for these classes as the aim of courses organised for these students was to provide basic practical knowledge in various subjects. The Housecraft rooms available in the primary schools were used for the various practical sessions, and this new practical slant given to the subject was well received by the students. Some even decided to stay on at school even though they had previously decided to leave school altogether (RwDE 1964). By 1967, these students visited the Housecraft School for a whole week to attend an intensive course in Cookery and Housecraft (RwDE 1967). They also had three one-week courses in Dress-Cutting and had greater opportunities to practice the skills of Dressmaking than other students in the primary school (RwDE 1968).

The curriculum of the extended courses devised by the education authorities in 1967 was varied and included a basic course in general education also comprising Home Economics and Dress Making (RwDE 1967). In addition to this basic course, when proceeding to the second year, students had the opportunity to opt for a special subject from Shorthand and Typing, Needlework, Cookery and Art (RwDE 1968). These practical-oriented courses proved popular with post-primary students, and some years later, the authorities opened two other schools, one to cater for boys and another for girls, with the same courses.

Needlework was a prominent subject in the curriculum of elementary/primary schools. While the girls were taught Needlework, boys learnt Drawing, Handwork or Craft. The subject’s importance in girls’ education remained constant throughout the years. The education authorities deemed it indispensable for the girls’ future roles as mothers and housewives, and important for the well-being of Maltese families as it promoted thrift, and in some cases gave girls the opportunity to earn money (Portelli, 2009). Modifications to the subject’s syllabus were carried out regularly, constantly focusing on the acquisition of appropriate skills needed in making up simple garments as early as Standard III, for ten and eleven years olds (DEdF, No. 700/49 - Primary School Syllabus 1949-50 and 1950-51). By 1960, Needlework was still a very important

subject for girls in the primary schools, and lots of good work was attributed to dedicated teachers. By 1961, Knitting, Needlework, Dress-cutting and Housecraft were being taught in primary schools. Almost every primary school was equipped with a sewing machine, a table for cutting-out, an electric iron and an ironing board (RwDE 1962), but the full development of Needlework was hindered by an insufficient supply of fabrics. In 1964, the inspectress of Housecraft noted that two main factors militated against greater progress in the teaching of the subject. Firstly, the Education Department recruited inexperienced emergency teachers who neither were trained in Needlework, nor possessed the necessary pedagogical skills. This was due to a shortage of available qualified and experienced teachers. Secondly, the chronic shortage of resources made it even more difficult for these teachers to conduct proper lessons (RwDE 1964).

### **3.2.2 Domestic subjects in the girls' grammar schools, the girls' secondary technical school and the school of Our Lady of Joy**

During the 1960s there was a total of four grammar schools for girls, three in Malta and one in Gozo. These schools enjoyed a high reputation among parents who saw them as a path to better job prospects for their daughters. All four schools followed a common academic curriculum, which included both Housecraft and Needlework.<sup>11</sup> Initially, the Housecraft curriculum at the grammar schools focused on theoretical aspects, with little or no focus on the practical component.

In 1960, a new curriculum for the grammar schools introduced a new approach, focusing on the practical aspect of particular areas of study, such as the sciences and others including Housecraft and Needlework. This was the first time that the Education Department provided special laboratories for the teaching of practical subjects in the grammar schools (RwDE 1960). Prior to the 1960s, a limited amount of practical work was carried out in these schools, hence the need to set up special rooms for this purpose was disregarded.

Not all the grammar schools had proper facilities to cater for the teaching of Housecraft. On many occasions, girls from these schools had to conduct their practical work either in another grammar school that had a well-equipped Housecraft room or

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<sup>11</sup> During the 1960s, Housecraft and Needlework were taught in various private/Church schools for girls.

at the Housecraft School. Although every effort was made by the Department of Education to have well-equipped Housecraft rooms, the performance of the students in the GCE examination in 1965 was not satisfactory and the passes were low or below average in some of the grammar schools (RwDE 1965).

Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary Technical School, established in October 1959, promoted practical subjects, and Craft, Art, Cookery, Housecraft and Needlework (RwDE 1960). The curriculum of the School was planned similar to that of the girls' grammar schools with the exception that the students studied one language instead of two during their first three years of schooling. Moreover, more time was allotted for practical subjects. The five-year school programme was similar to the one at the grammar schools as it aimed at leading the students to obtain British qualification, the GCE examination at Ordinary level (RwDE 1960).

The School included two separate buildings specifically designed to accommodate two large rooms for the teaching of Housecraft and Needlework. The latter was the second most popular after Shorthand and Typing, possibly due to the subject's popularity at primary level. Parents and students appreciated the usefulness of the subject, which was seen as a way to save money by sewing one's own clothes. At the time, it was common practice for households to own a sewing machine, and at least one family member could sew.<sup>12</sup> However, by 1968, a marked increase in the number of students opting for Home Economics was accompanied by a slight drop in those choosing Needlework (RwDE 1968). For the first time since the establishment of the school, the popularity of Needlework as a subject option diminished, despite the adoption in 1967-68 of a new syllabus for Housecraft and Needlework, suggesting that the priorities of parents and students in subject choice were changing.

In February 1966, a course, known as the 'practical/Home Economics UNICEF class', for girls was launched at the newly established school, Our Lady of Joy.<sup>13</sup> This institution, located in Floriana, was established as an offshoot of the Housecraft School

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<sup>12</sup> The popularity of Needlework was evident by the numerous evening classes of Dress-Cutting and Tailoring in Malta and Gozo (RwDE 1963).

<sup>13</sup> The course was referred to in this way as UNICEF had donated equipment and books in order to organise the course.



and offered the first type of pre-vocational course in the field.<sup>14</sup> Forty students from the senior classes of the primary school attended the one-year course, which included areas such as dressmaking, home management and nursing (RwDE 1966). Intensive Dressmaking and Cookery courses ran parallel with the basic subjects. This course achieved great success, and in the following years, many more students applied for the available 40 places (RwDE 1967; RwDE 1968).

### **3.2.3 Home Economics and Needlework at post-secondary education**

Initially, when post-secondary education was established for students who completed their final year at secondary school, only arts and science subjects were offered. Domestic subjects were not available as an option. Hence a few years after its establishment, Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary Technical School started to cater for those female students who wished to continue their studies by offering them to stay on for another two years after finishing Form V. In October 1967, a Sixth Form was set up at the School and accepted the first students to follow Advanced level courses in academic subjects. It also offered practical subjects, such as Arts and Crafts, Cookery/Home Economics and Needlework (RwDE 1967). The school was well equipped to cater for the practical sessions required for Advanced level.

The islands' strategic position in the Mediterranean and its climate were important factors that led to a boom in mass tourism. Initially, the Housecraft School was the only institution that could train personnel for the hospitality industry. During the 1960s, the School organised several six-month trainee courses in Housecraft, Catering and Cooking for females between 16 and 18 years of age who wanted to work as hotel staff (RwDE 1962; 1964).<sup>15</sup>

### **3.2.4 Housecraft at Mater Admirabilis Training College for Women Teachers**

Initially Housecraft was not offered as a subject of specialisation for prospective teachers at the Mater Admirabilis Training College for Women Teachers. It was offered for the first time in 1960 together with Needlecraft to a group of twelve students after they successfully passed an interview. In the initial years after the introduction of Domestic Science at the Training College, lectures were conducted by

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<sup>14</sup> When secondary education for all was introduced, the Centre came under the responsibility of the Headmistress of the Girls' Secondary School of Floriana (RwGD 1970).

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed curriculum of one such course held at the Housecraft School in 1970, see Appendix 1.

qualified British nationals, with the exception of Rita Chetcuti, a Maltese who was also inspectress of Infant Teaching and later of Domestic Science/Home Economics at the Education Department. The students at Mater Admirabilis Training College followed a core curriculum that was modelled closely on its British counterpart, based on one subject as the main area of specialisation and one as a subsidiary. Education Studies, Psychology, Methods of Teaching and Health Education formed part of the core subjects. In addition to the main area of specialisation and the subsidiary subject, most students could opt for infant teaching. The College housed fully equipped Needlecraft and Home Economics rooms, as well as an adjoining flatlet. At the end of the two-year residential course, external examiners were brought over from the UK to moderate the assessments during the final teaching practice which took place in Maltese schools (Curmi, n.d.).

### **3.3 Home Economics and Needlecraft during the 1970s**

#### **3.3.1 The subjects in secondary schools and Sixth Form during the 1970s**

The changes brought about by the introduction of secondary education for all had little effect on the teaching of Needlecraft in the primary school. The subject kept being taught to most classes, starting from Year III onwards, with a stronger emphasis on creativity as set out in the new 1970 syllabus (RwDE 1970).<sup>16</sup> However, Home Economics no longer formed part of the primary school curriculum due to the abolition of the senior classes.

By the end of the scholastic year 1970-71, Home Economics and Needlecraft were introduced as compulsory subjects in Form I and II, thus requiring more subject rooms and qualified teachers. These new Home Economics rooms had a similar layout to the one at the Housecraft School where students could work in kitchenettes in groups of four (RwDE 1970). In addition, each school had to house a flat or a flatlet for practical work related to home management. The tasks carried out in these flats were intended to provide a simulation of real-life situations in homes. The new syllabus for Home Economics in the secondary schools focused on ‘adopting a thorough practical approach’, which was lacking in the primary school syllabus (RwDE 1970, p. 64).

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<sup>16</sup> Needlecraft remained a primary school subject until 1980 (Ministry of Education, 1981).

When the Polytechnic, later known as the New Lyceum, was established at Msida in the 1970s, the teaching of Home Economics and Needlework at Advanced level was included in the school's curriculum. Two rooms were specifically designed and allocated for the practicals. Initially, the subjects were chosen by very few students, but along the years numbers increased considerably. Despite efforts by the education authorities to retrain and recruit Home Economics and Needlecraft teachers, schools had to face a chronic shortage in qualified staff for many years. When suitably qualified teachers were unavailable, part-time teachers had to be employed. However, as from 1977, the government decided to re-employ married teachers, who until then had been forced to resign upon marriage, especially to replace those on long leave of absence. This brought some respite from the chronic shortage of teachers, also to the advantage of Home Economics and Needlework (RwGD 1977-78).

### **3.3.2 The training of Home Economics and Needlecraft teachers**

Throughout the years, prospective of Home Economics and Needlecraft teachers obtained their professional qualifications at first by following a two-year residential course at Mater Admirabilis Training College for Women Teachers, then by reading for a University degree in Education, the B.A. (Educ.), later renamed as B.Ed. (Hons.), which varied in its duration from four to five years (Curmi, n.d.; Zammit Mangion, 1992). There were years when very few or no students were admitted to follow the degree course in Home Economics, due to lack of a sponsorship by the Department of Education, which was necessary at the time, a lack of interested students in the subjects, or a lack of suitably qualified ones.

### **3.4 The 1980s – Home Economics and Needlecraft in the girls' junior lyceums and trade schools**

When the junior lyceums were established in 1981 (RwGD 1981), Home Economics and Needlecraft were not given the same importance they had in the secondary schools (DEdF, No. 400/72). They were not included as compulsory subjects in Forms I and II, but only offered as options in Form III.<sup>17</sup> The reason for the removal of the subjects from the list of compulsory subjects was to provide a similar curriculum for boys and

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<sup>17</sup> There was only one small group per Form opting for Home Economics and Needlecraft from Form III upwards (DEdF, No. 400/72 – Education Officer of Home Economics and Needlework to the Asst. Director of Education, 9 March 1983).

girls in a drive towards equal opportunities in schools. At the time, boys were not taught Home Economics and Needlecraft. Hence, instead of providing boys with these subjects and technical education for girls, the decision of the Education authorities was to eliminate Home Economics and Needlecraft from the programme of studies of the first two years of secondary schooling (DEdF, No. 400/72).

In September 1983, after two years of lobbying by the subjects' Education Officer and the subjects' association, HENTA, Home Economics and Needlecraft were introduced in the curriculum of the junior lyceum students in Form I and Form II. A double lesson was granted for Home Economics teaching and classes in Needlecraft were to share the lessons with Art. This was organised by splitting a class into two groups, so students followed Needlecraft for half the year and Art for the other half. Additional Needlecraft rooms were equipped to cater for the increased number of students taking the subject (DEdF, No. 400/72 – Home Economics and Needlework Education Officer to the Minister of Education, 17 November 1981).

In 1980, trade schools experienced a marked decrease in popularity. A number of courses were phased out and others were discontinued. In order to provide a more holistic education for the girls attending the trade schools, Home Economics and Personal Care were introduced in the school curriculum as from the scholastic year 1985-86, as examinable subjects (RwGD 1985). The Personal Care syllabus prepared by the Education Officer responsible for Home Economics and Needlework was specifically designed to motivate this type of students (DEdF, No. 400/72 - Personal Care Syllabus, n.d.).

### **3.5 Developments in Home Economics education during the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium**

In September 1992, Home Economics was introduced for the first time to boys, many decades later than had been the case in other countries (Pullicino, [2009]). The first secondary school to offer the subject as an option was Vincenzo Bugeja Boys' Secondary School at St. Venera. This was a major achievement for the Home Economics community in Malta as the subject was stepping on new terrain. A Home Economics room was furnished with the proper equipment to cater for the practical aspect of the subject and a teacher was assigned to teach the fairly large group of students who had chosen the option. In the meantime, two Heads of School made a

request to the Home Economics Education Officer for assistance to offer the subject at their respective school following a great demand for Home Economics by their students. One of the schools was a junior lyceum that catered for more academically oriented students (Pullicino, [2009]). The curriculum was still the same as the one offered for girls, so the teachers had to create a male-friendly environment as much as possible in order to provide a fruitful experience for these boys. The number of boys opting for the subject increased throughout the years and spread in all state and co-ed independent schools. In recent years, Home Economics teaching has been also extended to boys' church schools.

Another important historical development in Home Economics education in that period was the Home Economics Seminar Centre. Housed at Pinto Stores in Valletta, it was initially called the Personal and Social Education Centre. It took a year to be set up, and was officially opened on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1992, when it also received its first visitors (Pullicino, [2009]). The Centre's aim was to provide an opportunity for secondary school students of both sexes to follow a day seminar on topics related to social education. Moreover, the Centre provided the opportunity for those students who did not study Home Economics to experience 'the essential knowledge for life' (Pullicino, [2009], p. 35). Its ultimate goal was to 'assist individuals and families to attain a holistic state of well-being' specifically through 'the efficient and effective management of their resources [and] the empowerment of participants to make informed healthy life-choices that will in turn lead to a healthy Maltese population' (The Home Economics Seminar Centre, 2005, np.). Initially, three seminars were offered to students. These were related to nutrition, money management and the environment. By the scholastic year 1997-98, these seminars had been attended by 5,299 secondary school students. During that year, a new initiative to invite parents along with their children to attend one of the seminars about nutrition proved fruitful (ARGDme 1997-1998). In 1999, the Centre was moved from Pinto Wharf to B'Kara Primary School Complex due to major developments in the Pinto Wharf area.

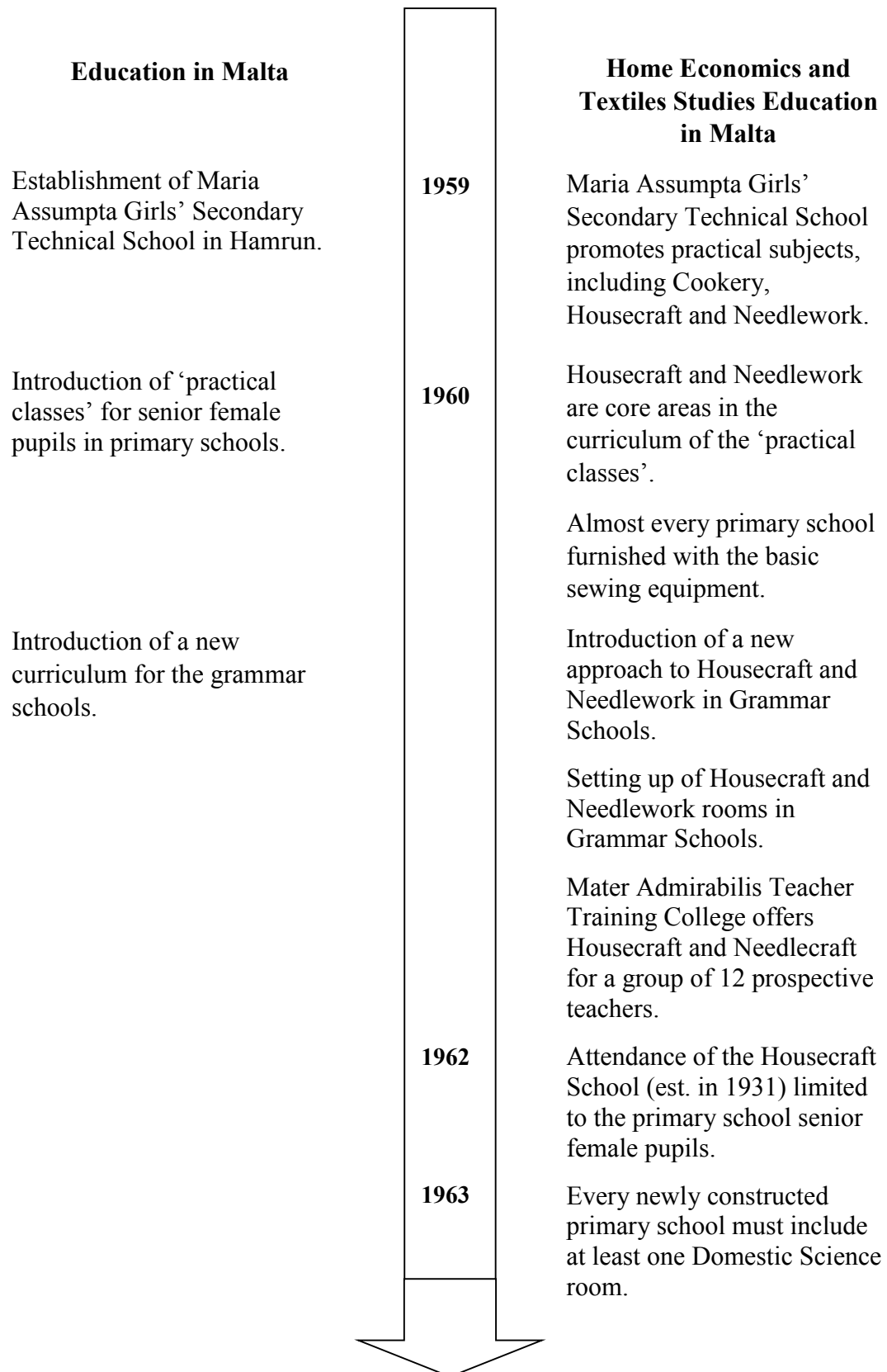
Home Economics and Textiles Studies were never included in the curriculum of the Church and Independent Sixth Forms. In 2009, a short-lived attempt was made by an Independent Sixth Form to offer Home Economics at Intermediate level (Camilleri, R. *Home Economics*, [email] Message to Portelli, L., 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). The subject

was taught at this level to a very small group of students for three years until 2012 when Home Economics was no longer included on the list of courses offered by this independent Sixth Form (Bezzina, M. *Sixth Form*, [email] Message to Portelli, L., 24<sup>th</sup> October 2013).

In 2002, the Faculty of Education introduced capping for several subject areas, including Home Economics. Initially, only ten students were accepted to follow the Home Economics course after successfully sitting for an interview. Consequently, many prospective students were unable to secure a place in the B.Ed. (Hons.) Home Economics course (NFCS Archives, *Students' Intake*, 2002). Some years later, the intake was increased to twelve. Capping was introduced 'in order to ensure quality Teaching Practice sessions and adequately trained B.Ed. (Hons.) graduates' (NFCS Archives, Faculty of Education Board Meeting, *Minutes* – 28 May 2003). In 2006, undergraduate Home Economics degree course changed its name to B.Ed. (Hons.) Home Economics/Nutrition, Family and Consumer Studies (NFCS) and is still currently being offered at University.

### **3.6 Summary – A timeline for the history of education and of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta**

The timeline below highlights the main events in the history of education, Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta for easy reference.



**Diagram 3.1:** Timeline for the major milestone of the historical developments in Malta of education in general, and Home Economics and Textiles Studies from 1960 to 2010.

## Education in Malta

Establishment of Our Lady of Joy School, as an offshoot of the Housecraft School.

Launch of the first 'extended courses' for post-primary girls in Mosta.

Introduction of secondary education for all.

Opening of the first trade school for girls in Floriana.

1966

1967

1970

1973

## Home Economics and Textiles Studies Education in Malta

Our Lady of Joy School offers the first type of pre-vocational course in Home Economics. UNICEF donates equipment and books for the course.

Curriculum of the 'extended courses' includes Home Economics and Dress Making.

Establishment of a Sixth Form for female students at Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary Technical School with a special focus on practical subjects.

Home Economics no longer part of the primary school curriculum. Needlecraft still taught to pupils from Year III onwards.

Home Economics and Needlecraft become compulsory for all girls in Forms I and II in all government secondary schools.

Home Economics syllabus given a practical approach.

Each secondary school is equipped with a Home Economics and a Needlecraft specialist room, and most schools include an adjoining Home Economics flatlet.

Floriana Trade School basic curriculum includes Dress-Cutting, Millinery, Sewing and related crafts.



## Education in Malta

Establishment of the Malta College of Education through the amalgamation of the two teacher training colleges (Mater Admirabilis Training College for Women Teachers and St Michael's Training College for Men).

Abolition of the 11<sup>+</sup> examinations and any form of testing up to 16 years.

Promulgation of new Education Act.

Compulsory education age limit raised to 16 year-olds.

The Department of Education Studies at the MCAST takes over the College of Education.

Re-introduction of formal annual examinations.

Co-education in primary schools.

Re-employment of married teachers.

Establishment of the Faculty of Education and the closing down of MCAST.

Major reform in the upper forms of all government secondary schools. Grouping of students by ability (Group 1 and Group 2).

## Home Economics and Textiles Studies Education in Malta

Serious shortage of Home Economics and Needlecraft teachers.

Establishment of the first Home Economics and Needlework Teachers Association (HENTA).

Married women teachers provides a respite for the chronic shortage of Home Economics and Needlework teachers.

1973

1974

1975

1976

1977

1978

1979

## Education in Malta

Abolition of comprehensive schooling and adoption of a tripartite system of schooling.

Establishment of the first Junior Lyceum for girls in Blata l-Bajda.

Establishment of Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School in the same premises of the New Lyceum in Msida.

Reform in the entry requirements for the government Sixth Form.

Re-introduction of the Arts and Science degree courses at University.

Establishment of the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS).

Promulgation of a new Education Act.

1981

1982

1983

1985

1987

1988

## Home Economics and Textiles Studies Education in Malta

Home Economics and Needlework no longer compulsory for female students in Forms I and II in the newly established Junior Lyceum.

Launching of a two-year evening Diploma course in Home Economics and Needlecraft at the University of Malta.

Re-introduction of Home Economics and Needlecraft in Forms I and II at the Girls' Junior Lyceum. Needlecraft courses share the load with Art lessons for the whole year.

Introduction of Home Economics and Personal Care in the girls' trade schools.

## Education in Malta

Introduction of the NMC for primary schools.

Launch of the NMC for secondary schools.

Publication of the first revised syllabi for secondary schools in accordance with the new NMC.

Adoption of a new system of local examinations (SEC and MC) at a national level.

Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary moved to a new premises in Naxxar.

New Lyceum passes under the responsibility of the University of Malta and is known as Junior College.

1989

1990

1991

1992

1993

1994

## Home Economics and Textiles Studies Education in Malta

Home Economics is one of the preferred subject for admission in some of the courses at the ITS and the School of Hairdressing.

Opening of the Home Economics Seminar Centre, initially called Personal and Social Education Centre, in Valletta. It offers seminars on nutrition, money management and the environment to secondary school students.

Introduction of Home Economics for boys as an option in Form III in some boys' secondary schools.

First cohort of students sitting for SEC in Home Economics and Needlecraft and Dress.

Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary offers Home Economics and Needlework course at Ordinary and Advanced level.

## Education in Malta

## Home Economics and Textiles Studies Education in Malta

	<b>1996</b>	<p>First cohort of students sitting for Home Economics and Human Ecology at Advanced level.</p> <p>Introduction of coursework in the Home Economics and Needlecraft syllabi in secondary schools.</p>
<p>Publication of a new NMC.</p> <p>Implementation of the new NMC in schools.</p> <p>Start of syllabi review to reflect the requirements of the new NMC.</p>	<b>1999</b>	<p>The Home Economics Seminar Centre moved to B'Kara and offers a range of seminars to students and parents.</p> <p>Introduction of coursework in Home Economics and Textiles and Design syllabi at SEC level.</p>
<p>Closure of all trade schools.</p> <p>Re-establishment of MCAST as a vocational and training institution.</p>	<b>2001</b>	
<p>Introduction of capping by the Faculty of Education for a number of subject areas.</p>	<b>2002</b>	<p>Capping is applied to the B.Ed. (Hons.) course. Only 10 places are available.</p> <p>Establishment of a new Association for Home Economics and Textiles Studies Teachers, Home Economist in Action (HEiA).</p>
	<b>2003</b>	<p>Introduction of Home Economics and Human Ecology at Intermediate level.</p>

<b>Education in Malta</b>		<b>Home Economics and Textiles Studies Education in Malta</b>
A network of school colleges is set up as a pilot project.	<b>2005</b>	
The Promulgation of the Education (Amendments) Act.	<b>2006</b>	Approval of the new name for the degree in course Home Economics as B.Ed. (Hons.) Nutrition, Family and Consumer Studies.
Restructuring of the Education Division and the setting up of ten school colleges.		Practical work at SEC level in Home Economics and Textiles and Design restricted to coursework.
Review of the NMC.	<b>2008</b>	Launch of M.Ed. in Health, Family and Consumer Studies.
Launch of a new education reform.	<b>2009</b>	
Abolition of the 11 <sup>+</sup> selective examination and introduction of benchmarking in primary schools.	<b>2011</b>	Some Home Economics teachers recruited to teach two new vocational subjects, Hospitality and Health and Social Care.
Introduction of vocational subjects as a pilot project in some secondary schools.		
Launch of a National Curriculum Framework for All (NCF) to replace the NMC.	<b>2013</b>	

## **Part 2 - The international and Maltese scenario – a thematic overview**

### **3.7 Introduction**

The curriculum history of Home Economics and Textiles Studies has been the object of various international studies. Academics in different parts of the world have researched and discussed the topic by focusing on their respective country's experience. An analysis of the resulting literature enables the identification of the challenges faced by the subjects for their survival in the school curricula of different countries through time. The issues emerging from the international literature shall be considered in the light of the subjects' history in Malta, with a view to provide a backdrop for the analysis of the data presented in following chapters.

#### **3.7.1 Domestic Economy as a practical science – the path for status recognition**

Several international researchers identified the non-academic status of the subjects as an important issue in the latter's curriculum history (Purvis, 1985; Attar, 1990; Pendergast, 2001; Yung Chan, 2005). Domestic subjects have supported females for many decades by providing practical skills to manage successful households. Ever since their establishment in schools, both Home Economics and Textiles Studies have had a substantial part of their syllabi dedicated to a practical component which has been viewed as an indispensable element of the subjects themselves. However, the strong practical slant of the subjects gave them a low status when compared to other subjects (Grundy and Henry, 1995). Historically, practical and vocational-oriented subjects have always been considered as having a lower status than academic subjects (Goodson, 1985). In the case of domestic subjects, their practical nature reinforced this perception. For this reason, education authorities in various countries tried to find a remedy to the situation. For example, in the UK and the US, the teaching of scientific principles applicable to the practical aspect of Domestic Economy was included in the curriculum in order to improve its status among other school subjects. Mander (1987) argued that the nature of Domestic Economy required some basic knowledge of science as it applied scientific principles to the well-being of the family and to the home. Many specialists maintained that their subject was a science and not just training girls in acquiring skills (Elias, 2008). In America and Britain, Chemistry, Physics, Biology and General Science were pre-requisites for specialisation in Domestic Economy at tertiary level (Elias, 2008; DEdF, No. 525/55 - General Correspondence;

DEdF, No. 59/67 - Prospectuses from UK Colleges and Institutes; DEdC, No. 105/67). However, the attempt to develop a scientific body of knowledge related to the family and the home environment, similarly to other applied sciences in the school curriculum, became an uphill struggle for the members of Home Economics communities in many countries (Mander, 1987; Pendergast, 2001; Yung Chan, 2005; McSweeney, 2007).

In Malta, Domestic Economy (or Housecraft) faced the same challenges. For most decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the aim of the Maltese education authorities was that girls were to learn how to take care of the family and the home. The introduction of practical domestic subjects in the curriculum for Maltese girls' primary schools was an important step taken by the education authorities. The latter identified the value of learning such subjects in providing girls with the appropriate skills 'for the part they must play both in the home and in those walks of life that belong properly to the orbit of women' (RwDE 1948-54, p. XXVI). For this reason, the Housecraft syllabi devised in Malta were modelled on the British syllabi for Domestic Science, but they were still focused on the domestic component. The need for a more scientific approach was still not felt locally as was the case in the UK. In the 1957/58 and 1961 Housecraft syllabi, it was emphasised that 'Domestic Science is to be taught with special reference to practical applications in daily life, and the ordinary uses of the home' (GMR 2120, p. 158; GMR 2332, p. 105). It was of little interest to the authorities whether any scientific theory was included in the subject or applied through practical work or not. In the 1957/58 Girls' Grammar School syllabus, there was a considerable increase in references to science. Some aspects of Biology and Chemistry were included, such as '[...] an elementary knowledge of the chief functions of the organs concerned with: Respiration, Circulation, and Excretion. Digestion – Organs and process' and '[...] the composition, use and effects of common cleaning materials used in house cleaning, in laundry work and in the removal of stains' (GMR 2120, p.160 - 161). These syllabi followed closely the Ordinary level syllabi published by the the University of Oxford Delegacy of Examination for their GCEs (University of Oxford Delegacy of Examinations, Regulations, 1958-1967; University of Oxford Delegacy of Examinations, Regulations and Syllabuses, 1968-1974).

The Inspectress responsible for Housecraft followed closely the choice of textbooks being made in British schools, and was keen to follow suit. For this reason, the textbooks used in Malta in the 1950s and 1960s presented a scientific approach to Domestic Economy. One of the books used by local teachers was entitled '*Housecraft Science*'. In its preface, the author stated that the book 'covers a very wide field, since housecraft and homemaking come into direct contact with several branches of science at so many points' (Holt, 1956). The books in the series '*Science in the Home*', which included '*Food and Nutrition*', '*Fabric and Laundrywork*' and '*The Home*', were also used by local Housecraft teachers.

These books reflect the trend adopted in the 1960s by British examination boards of applying a scientific approach to the otherwise mostly skill-based subject (Robinson, 1977). However, despite the introduction of British contemporary textbooks, Housecraft in Malta remained a practical subject during the 1960s. Older books focusing mostly on cookery, household management and the family were still widely available in the subject rooms. On their part, the teachers followed the local syllabus, which focused on the above topics rather than on scientific principles. Consequently, anecdotal evidence shows that the prevalent custom among teachers was to pick and choose from different books, according to the topic and the ability of their pupils.

Moreover, the link between Housecraft and the other sciences was generally overlooked. The majority of prospective Maltese candidates who were interested in obtaining qualifications in Domestic Science from British institutions had no formal qualifications in science subjects (DEdF, No. 59/67 - Application forms for Scholarships). A number of eligible candidates for courses in Domestic Science had to study one or two of the requested sciences prior to proceeding with their studies abroad. Rita Chetcuti, who in 1937 was one of the first Maltese to study Domestic Science at the Training College for Teachers of Domestic Subjects in Bath, highlighted the need for qualifications in science:

The principal of the school where I was teaching wrote a letter to the Director of Education and recommended that I should follow a course in science in order to be prepared for the course at Bath. In those days, girls didn't study Sciences at school.



So I went to University, in Valletta, for a course in Chemistry. I had to do some Biology and Physics privately, in preparation for what I had to study in Bath (Portelli, 1996).

Nearly three decades later, these requirements still applied for prospective Home Economics students who wished to follow courses in England (Bath College of Education, 1967/68). As from the 1970s, the University of Malta imposed particular requirements for students who opted for Home Economics and Needlework. In the latter part of the decade, those choosing Home Economics were required to have an 'O' level in the subject and at least one 'O' level pass in a science subject, preferably Chemistry, General Science or Integrated Science.

Another important aspect in the teaching of domestic subjects in many countries has been the correlation between pedagogy on one hand and the ability and the social class of students on the other (Purvis, 1985). Home Economics and Textiles Studies have often been labelled as soft options and therefore it is assumed that they are easy subjects that do not require any specific knowledge. As a result, for many years these subjects have been mainly targeted towards the less able, unmotivated and less academically oriented students (Purvis, 1985). In the early years of its establishment, Home Economics was deemed to be more suited to working-class girls, who were likely to find employment with upper-class families as servants or maids. Needlework was also taught to working-class girls, as it was found to be engaging enough to keep restless, academically unmotivated girls under control (Dyhouse, 1981; Turnbull, 1987; Portelli, 1996).

Such an apparently flattering view of the subject, however, did not guarantee an appropriate allocation of resources. As Byrne (1974) rightly argued, one of the factors influencing the acquisition of resources is the academic status accorded to a school subject. Although the teaching of Domestic Science was as successful in Maltese primary schools as it was in British schools, the funding available was barely comparable (RwDE 1958-59), and the shortage of qualified teachers and inadequate funding were constantly discussed in various correspondence of the Education Department. The fact that until recently domestic subjects were taught exclusively to girls certainly did not help in this respect.

### **3.7.2. The gendered nature of the subjects**

Do not forget that you are a girl and that you one day will be a wife and mother and carry the responsibility for your family's well-being. The home and kitchen is your proper workplace and, by God and society, housework is your fate (Johansson, 1997, quoted in Hjalmeskog, 2000, p.32).

The above quotation aptly illustrates how in the past, societal perception assigned women a lower status than that reserved to men. Due to their traditionally household-oriented nature, Domestic subjects are an emblematic case of sex stereotyping.

Historically, when they were included in various school curricula based on the British model, Needlework and later Domestic Science were always considered female-oriented subjects (Bayliss, 1978; Purvis, 1985; Mander, 1987; Attar, 1990). Since their establishment in the US and British curricula in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these subjects were based on skills and techniques which were generally considered useful for females in the light of their future roles as homemakers. The subjects, with the exception of Needlework, were taught only to working-class female students as they provided specific skills that were useful for girls to find employment as domestic servants with middle and upper class families (Purvis, 1984; Powers, 1992; Portelli, 1996; Gomersall, 1997).

The gendered nature and scope of domestic subjects in the school curriculum attracted the critical attention of feminist intellectuals. Several feminist historians, such as Dyhouse (1981), Purvis (1985) and Turnbull (1987), provided a critical account for the establishment of domestic subjects in the British school curriculum, as well as their role in the dissemination of a middle-class ideology through training in housework and an emphasis on the woman's place in the home. Bourgeois values of home and family were being indirectly transmitted to working class girls through these subjects. In the United States, Home Economics has been a target for feminists from its early years of its establishment in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Thompson, 1992), in spite of the fact that home economists and feminists shared similar views on what constituted the best interests of women and children (Brown, 1985). During the early twentieth century, feminists in the United States and Britain were the forerunners in criticizing the teaching of gendered subjects. Home Economics was seen as a way to perpetuate the traditional role assigned to women, confined to the domestic sphere and

subservient to the needs of the husband. The subject was thus considered oppressive and demeaning for women, as its content was focused on fulfilling family needs (see East, 1980; Purvis, 1985; Paechter, 1998). As Powers (1992) rightly pointed out, 'Home economics advocates included people who wanted women to retreat to their nineteenth century 'haven'...The paradox of the home economics campaign and reform was that it was both traditional and feminist at once' (p. 13). At the time, women's organisations and Home Economics educators lobbied for the recognition of homemaking as a profession. However, some professional home economists had different views on this matter. For instance, Richards, who was critical of the early feminist movement established in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, focused on the importance of applying science to Home Economics.<sup>18</sup> On her part, Christine Fredrick, a home-efficiency expert, believed that scientific management of homemaking would classify the field as a management science, and domestic feminists acknowledged that the woman's domain is the home and family, but should also include other interests including social and political concerns. These three fronts collaborated on certain aspects, and worked in favour of a dignified status for women. Other feminists, however, objected to these conciliatory perspectives, maintaining that Home Economics was a means of directing young middle class women away from paid work, maintaining the traditional homemaking skills and ensuring a good supply of skilled domestic workers (Powers, 1992).

The second wave liberal, radical and socialist feminists, who were active in Western countries in the late 1960s, failed to view home economists as allies and considered them as 'the enemy' (Cooper, 1972, quoted in Thompson, 1986). However, the latter considered themselves as working in favour of improving the social status of women (Elias, 2008). Some feminists blamed the subject for perpetuating a stereotypical perspective of the role of women in society. The feminists' strong challenge to the domestic role of women in society also found its artistic expression in Martha Rosler's widely known video installation entitled *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975).<sup>19</sup> Various feminists expressed their strong beliefs against the teaching of Home Economics (see Friedan, 1963; Morgan, 1973). In her controversial critique of domestic subjects,

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<sup>18</sup> Ellen H. Richards was one of the founders of American Home Economics Association [AHEA] (now known as the American Association for Family and Consumer Sciences) in the US.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zSA9Rm2PZA>

*Wasting Girls' Time: The History and Politics of Home Economics* (1990), Attar strongly condemned the teaching and learning of domestic subjects. She considered them a 'waste of time' for girls, as they did not contribute to the 'empowering [of] the weak and vulnerable and failed to advance women towards greater control of their lives' (p. 148).

Although home economists were involved in the struggle to improve the social status of women through education, the second wave feminists, especially the radical feminists, failed to acknowledge their efforts to liberate women from gender oppression. In the 1960s and 1970s, many feminists vehemently voiced their concern, arguing that Home Economics was a means of reinforcing traditional stereotype perceptions and was not intellectually challenging enough for bright females (East, 1980; Pendergast, 2001). This was evident from the fact that the majority of those in the profession, and a higher percentage of students opting for the subject were female (see Pendergast, 2001). In the following decades, several renowned academics, including Pendergast (2001), Badir (1990) and Thompson (1992, 1995), among others, analysed the relationship between feminism and Home Economics. Their research contributed to enrich further the discourse about feminist critique.

Thompson (1992) claimed that Home Economics was never a means of perpetuating the gender role stereotypes within society. On the contrary, the subject contributes to reduce them. She believed that 'its [Home Economics] vulnerability rests on the fact that it challenges – implicitly if not explicitly – the bias and error in patriarchal assumptions about what constitutes worthwhile knowledge and education'. Instead of challenging these assumptions, however, feminists had accepted them as being correct (1992, p. 19). In any case, reflexivity in Home Economics was deemed the most appropriate attitude practitioners should take in order 'to be reconciled in some way with women's history, feminist history, the history of science, and the history of education' (Thompson, 1997, p. 11, quoted in Pendergast, 2001, p. 57).

The historical origins of Home Economics, the long legacy of focusing on preparing females for their future roles in a patriarchal society, and the concern towards the well-being of the family and its members kept the field as a target for feminist criticism (Pendergast, 2001). In Malta, feminism never managed to have a strong impact on social debate, so the role of domestic subjects in local education was not challenged

from this ideological perspective. However, the changes in the subjects that occurred overseas as an effect of feminist critique found their way in the local syllabi of the subjects indirectly through the British-inspired syllabi, as did other changes occurring in Western societies in terms of equal opportunities for both sexes (such as the UK Sex Discrimination Act of 1975).

Since the early nineties, the introduction of Home Economics and Textiles Studies for boys provided the first strong challenge to the gendered perception of the subjects. However, the opening up of domestic subjects to males in the school curriculum did not provide an overnight solution in this respect. In fact, despite efforts made by educational authorities in the new millennium to improve the gendered nature of the curriculum in most European countries, the general tendency among students is still to choose gender-stereotyped subjects and careers. Weiner (2010) remarked:

School leavers' destination statistics in Europe show that many young people still opt for gendered-stereotyped career choices and it has been argued therefore that career advisors need to be more gender aware, and thus more able to challenge stereotyped assumptions of students, school culture and employers (p. 27).

On her part, Measor (1983) contrasted the reactions provided by boys towards cookery and needlework with girls' reactions towards the natural sciences. She found that boys regarded Domestic Sciences as not 'appropriately masculine' (p. 182), and she concluded that pupils tend to select school subjects that 'act as marker flags for their identity' (p. 189). School subjects appeared to reinforce gender roles, thus having implications on the relationship between gender and the curriculum.

Moreover, the new opportunity for boys to choose domestic subjects had to be coupled with corresponding career opportunities in order to attract interest from male pupils and redress the gender imbalance in the subjects. Moreover, the subjects' course design took some time to reflect these changes and the process is still ongoing. One of the issues that was strengthened further by these developments concerned the name of the disciplines.

### **3.7.3. The search for a name and definition**

Like many other disciplines, Home Economics is continually evolving by redefining its mission, its purpose and its values. Historically, this evolving process included

changes to the subject's name in order to assert its identity. Accomplishing such a goal for such a highly gendered and multi-faceted discipline has proved very difficult.

Since Home Economics was established as a discipline in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, home economists in many countries have struggled to provide a clear definition for the term 'domestic subjects' that encompasses all the areas covered by their subject, and to develop their professional identity (RMC, Cornell University, 2001). Several factors proved crucial in this quest, namely the subject's interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature, the changes in the role of women and family structures, poor image of the home and family that reflects negatively on the discipline, as well as the desire to enhance the importance of the field in academia (Kerka, 1996). Other academics also referred to additional factors, such as the need to make the discipline more visible and to recruit more male students in order to create gender equality in courses at higher institutions (Pendergast and McGregor, 2007; McGregor, 2010).

The 'proliferation of labels' given to Home Economics has produced names that have different meaning in many countries (Anderson Darling, 1995, p. 367). They vary depending on the country and the perspectives of the subjects' professional community. The background of the top-level administrators at educational institutions has historically also been an influential factor on the name that was given to the subject. Moreover, name change or the 'language game' (Pendergast, 2001) was considered one of the possible means of trying to tackle the identity crises that crippled the subject over the years. Several academics disapproved of the constant change in name, with some arguing that this approach showed that the profession was in crisis (Brown and Baldwin, 1995). Others believed that the profession was 'striving to be accepted by those in power' (Pendergast and McGregor, 2007).

The evolution of the name given to domestic subjects over the past century was influenced by the historical, political, social and economic situations of those countries where the subjects formed part of the programmes of studies in various educational institutions. Internationally, various names were used to refer to what are generally referred to as 'domestic subjects'.

The name for the discipline was a perennial source of debate in many countries. This has been the case especially in the US, which has always been the beacon of

developments in the field. Consequently, the US debates over subject name also had repercussions in other countries.

### The American experience

As early as 1899, during the first Lake Placid conference, 'Home Economics' was considered a better term than 'Household Arts' to refer to what was previously referred to as Housewifery, Household Economics, Domestic Economy, Domestic Science and a number of other terms, at various educational institutions in different parts of the country (Craig, 1945).

During the same conference, a 'tripartite terminology' was adopted for use in different educational sectors: 'Domestic Economy' for younger pupils in elementary schools, 'Domestic Science' for courses at high schools and 'Home Economics' for college courses and graduate work (Stage, 1997, p. 6). The issue of providing a definition and nomenclature for Home Economics was raised in a number of Lake Placid conferences, particularly during the fourth conference held in 1902. The name 'Home Economics' was considered the most appropriate name for the field of study, and the members attending the conference agreed on a definition to describe what the discipline entailed.

Home economics, in its most comprehensive sense, is the study of the laws, conditions, principles and ideals which are concerned on the one hand with man's immediate physical environment and on the other with his nature as a social being and is the study especially of the relation between these two factors.

In a narrow sense the term is given to the study of the empirical sciences with special reference to the practical problems of housework, cooking, etc. (Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics. Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Conference, 1902. p. 70).

The committee members searched for a better alternative name to Home Economics, in order to give a clearer indication of the content of their discipline. Ellen Richards, who was one of the early promoters of this discipline, sought unsuccessfully to name it 'Oekology' (ecology) and later 'Euthenics' (the science of controlled environment for right living) (Craig, 1945).<sup>20</sup> She believed that the subject should go beyond the

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<sup>20</sup> 'Ecology' was not accepted as a suitable name for the discipline, as Richards realised that the term was already used by botanists. Interestingly, in the 1960s and 1970s some schools and colleges in the US changed the name from 'Home Economics' to 'Human Ecology' (Stage, 1997).

domestic sphere of cooking and sewing, and she wanted to make Home Economics a profession suitable for educated women. Richards acknowledged that 'Home Economics' should be the preferred term for this vast field of study, although she preferred the discipline to be called 'Domestic Science', as she hoped that eventually the subject would find a prestigious place in academia and would not be confused with household arts. Richards explained that the word 'home' in the name 'Home Economics' referred to '[...] the place of shelter and nurture for the children and for those personal qualities of self-sacrifice for others, for the gaining of strength to meet the world' and 'economics' referred to '[...] the management of this home on economic lines as to time and energy as well as mere money' (Richards, 1908, p. 22).

Richards's aspiration for Home Economics remained unfulfilled until her death in 1911, as the subject shifted towards vocational training rather than becoming a professional field for educated women. The Smith-Hughes Vocational Act of 1917, which provided the necessary funding for the establishment of teacher training courses for Home Economics teachers in elementary and high schools, further enhanced the vocational aspect of the discipline (Stage, 1997).

Table 3.1 provides an overview of the different names given to domestic subjects (excluding Needlework, which shall be discussed later) in USA, Britain and Malta in different periods.

The original definition provided during the fourth Lake Placid Conference evolved according to issues directly or indirectly related to the discipline. Along the years, further definitions were sought in an attempt to unify the field and provide a direction for the future. For example, the 1959 report entitled *Home Economics - New Directions: A Statement of Philosophy and Objectives*, proposed that the discipline adopt an integrative approach to teaching and learning with the family being its main focus (AHEA, 1959). The suggestion was unsuccessful, and attempts to redefine the field continued in the following decades. Byrd (1970) suggested a new direction for developing a definition for Home Economics, one that reflected the changing nature of the subject with a clear vision for the new millennium:

We are in great need of a new concept of home economics - a creative approach, a broadening and supplementing of the philosophy which has

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served us in good stead over the past 60 years. Such an approach is essential to moving the profession from its defensive posture' (Byrd, 1970, p. 411).

PERIOD OF TIME (indicative)	COUNTRY		
	USA	BRITAIN	MALTA
<b>In 1871</b>	Domestic Economy (Coll.)		
<b>In 1878 - 1914</b>		Domestic Economy (Elem.)/ Domestic Science	
<b>In 1879/1885</b>	Domestic Science/Domestic Economy/Household Economics (Public schools)		
<b>1899</b>	Domestic Economy (Elem.) Domestic Science (High Sch.) Home Economics (Coll. & Univ.) Home Economics (General term)		
<b>In 1899 - 1929</b>			Domestic Economy (Elem.) Domestic Science (Sec.)
<b>1920 - 1960</b>		Domestic Science/Housecraft (Elem.)	
<b>1930 - 1970</b>			Housecraft (Elem./Prim./Sec.) Domestic Science (Sec.)
<b>1960 - 1978</b>			Housecraft (Teach. Coll.)
<b>1965 - 1970</b>			Home Economics/Housecraft (Elem./Sec.)
<b>1969</b>	Human Development Human Ecology (Coll.)		
<b>1970 -</b>			Home Economics (Sec.)
<b>1971 - 1988</b>		Home Economics	
<b>1978 - 2006</b>			Home Economics (Univ.)
<b>1993 -</b>	Family and Consumer Sciences		
<b>2006 -</b>			Nutrition, Family and Consumer Studies (Univ.)

**Table 3.1:** An overview of the different names given to domestic subjects in USA, Britain and Malta related to the different periods of time.

Byrd maintained that a redefinition is essential in the light of some predictions that have direct implications on the discipline, such as increase in world population, environment pollution, scarcity of natural resources and increased life expectancy. Byrd's suggested definition reflected these predictions: 'Home Economics is the study of the human and material forces affecting homes and families and the utilization of this knowledge for the benefit of mankind' (Byrd, 1970, p. 414).

The discipline kept the name 'Home Economics', for many decades. However, during the 1960s, debates about name change were already underway in a number of educational institutions. The first to pave the way were two colleges that changed their names from 'Home Economics' to 'Human Development' and 'Human Ecology' in 1969 (Kay, 2012). In 1974, a study conducted by Yankelovich, about the public's perception towards Home Economics brought about further discussion on the clarification of the discipline's identity (Yankelovich, 1974). In the following years, different members of AHEA and other academics carried out a soul-searching exercise in this regard (see Johnson et al., 1987).

Brown and Paolucci (1979) provided an important contribution in the attempt to resolve the identity crisis that was shackling the profession. They conducted an in-depth philosophical analysis to provide a definition of Home Economics. The study was developed on the idea that Home Economics is a 'critical science', based on the philosophy of Habermas regarding critical theory as applied to culture. Their work stimulated a series of internal discussions on Home Economics as a discipline and as a profession, and had an impact especially on Home Economics curriculum content at various levels, mostly in secondary and higher education. It encouraged a move away from the development of knowledge and skill based curricula to an 'empowerment model with more concern for critical thinking and cultural critique' (Vincenti, 1997, p. 304).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the struggle for legitimation of the field triggered continuous reforms which led to an increase in the variety of names given to the subject. Other colleges and universities changed the name of their programmes and the content of their courses. Various combinations of terms were used, including 'consumer', 'development', 'ecology', 'family', 'human', and 'science'. By the end of the 1980s, more than thirty names were adopted by higher education departments; in

many cases, the latter sought to highlight particular aspects of their areas of specialisation.

At the Scottsdale Conference of 1993, the discipline was renamed 'Family and Consumer Sciences' following a consensus about a correct name which truly reflects the nature of the discipline (Vincenti, 1997). According to Pendergast (2001), the inclusion of the term 'family' in the 1990s, reflected the language games that home economists play to legitimise their field.<sup>21</sup> The use of 'Family and Consumer Studies/Science' as the new name used instead of 'Home Economics' indicated a strong focus on individual and family well-being (Vincenti, 1997). Pendergast claimed that the use of such 'socially fashionable terminology' reflected the struggle made by home economists to make their field of study accepted by society (2001, p. 45). She argued that 'name and terminology perceptions' are one of the issues that result from the problematic nature of the subject (2001). The lack of unity over the name, cast the discipline in a bad light for many outsiders.

The highly fragmented content made it difficult to find a single definition and to clarify the identity of the discipline. This resulted in the creation of several definitions of the discipline itself and of the profession, both in the US and Britain. According to Deacon (1987), what was established in the Lake Placid Conferences regarding the mission and the nature of the discipline was still applicable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She advocated collaboration between scholars and practitioners in asserting the interrelationship of the different specialisations. However, most academics prefer to keep the different specialisations separate in this multidisciplinary area of study (Yung Chan, 2005).

### The British experience

In Britain, the evolution of the name for the discipline was slightly different from that in the US. Initially, Domestic Economy was used as a name in elementary schools by 1878 (Dyhouse, 2013). Other elements related to the discipline such as cookery, sewing, housewifery and laundry work were taught to females by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Purvis, 1985). The acquisition of the name 'Domestic Science' was achieved gradually between 1880 and 1914 after the discipline was considered as a practical

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<sup>21</sup> The inclusion of the term 'family' in the name 'Family and Consumer Studies/Science' was influenced by the International Year of the Family in 1994 proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly (Pendergast, 2001).

science (Attar, 1989). Later, after the Second World War, 'Housecraft' was the preferred name given to the discipline until in the 1960s it was renamed 'Home Economics'. The exact year when the term Home Economics was used is unclear, as the discipline was referred to as 'Housecraft' and 'Home Economics' interchangeably until the early 1970s (see references in Purvis, 1985 and Attar, 1989). At the time, home economists in the UK were also struggling to define their own identity, similarly to their counterparts in the US (Vaines, 1979; Attar, 1989). Home economists felt the need to redefine their discipline in order to assert their professional identity and show the usefulness of their subject, to respond to the misinterpretation made by other academics, professionals, and the education authorities themselves. Identity and the nature of the discipline were the source of debates conducted by all those involved in the teaching of Home Economics in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s (Attar, 1989). The teaching of Home Economics as a distinct discipline was brought to an end by the Education Reform Act of 1988, which brought about the introduction of D&T with the elimination of Home Economics from the secondary school time-table in England.<sup>22</sup>

In the former British colonies, the changes in the names given to domestic subjects followed closely that of the motherland. The various names used were similar to those used in Britain, albeit with a strong influence from America. Pendergast (2001) gave a chronology of the names that were used for the subjects in Queensland, Australia. These varied from 'Domestic Economy', 'Home Economics' and 'Human Ecology' to 'Family and Consumer Studies'. Yung Chan (2005) and Ma and Pendergast (2011), provided an interesting insight into the subject's name change in Hong Kong. Initially, the subject was referred to as 'Domestic Science', then it became 'Domestic Subjects', and subsequently 'Home Economics'.

### The Maltese experience

The evolution of the disciplines' name in Malta was strongly influenced by the islands' colonial past, the terms given to domestic subjects being the same as those used in Britain. Names such as 'Domestic Economy', 'Domestic Science', 'Housecraft',

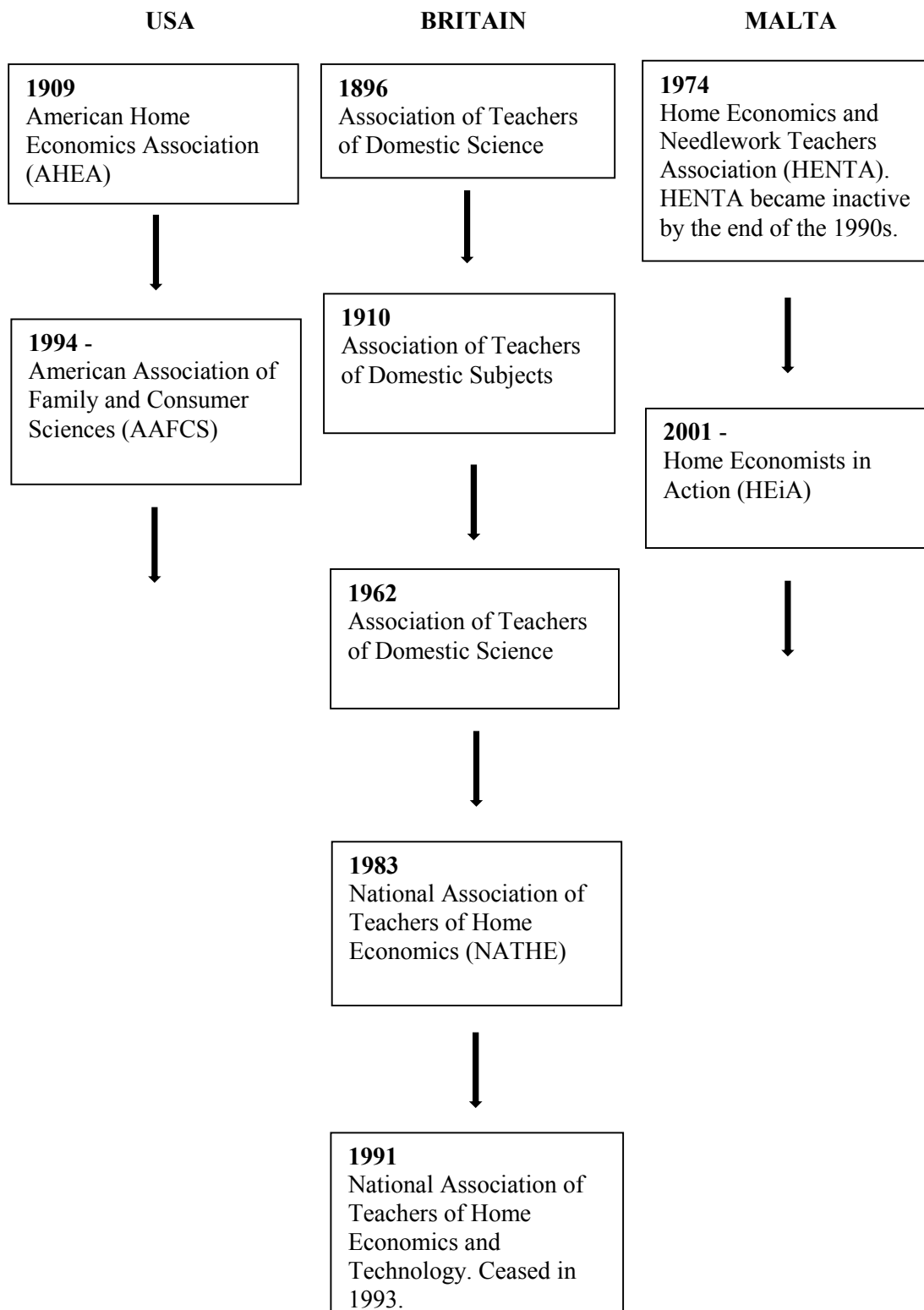
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<sup>22</sup> Home Economics is still offered as a subject in a number of colleges in Britain and in some secondary schools in Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

‘Housewifery’, ‘Home Economics’ and ‘Home Economics and Human Ecology’ were used over the years in Malta (Portelli, 1996, p. 65).

Available primary documents provide an indication of specific times when the different names were used in the various school syllabi written for Maltese schools. Very few additional details were given for the use of the different names, unlike what happened in the US and Britain. In Malta, Needlework, as a school subject, was always kept separate from Housecraft and Domestic Science, but was included under the term ‘Domestic Subjects’. As was also the case in Britain. At the turn of the twentieth century, Domestic Economy was the name used in the Maltese elementary school syllabus and on the school timetable, similar to the name given to the discipline in other countries (ARwDPI 1910-11 and part of 1912). By the end of the 1920s, ‘Housecraft’ was the preferred term used in these schools (RwGD 1929-30), and its popularity further increased when the Housecraft School was set up in 1931. The adoption of the name ‘Housecraft’ was the most suitable term to use in order to indicate a continuation to what was already being studied in the subject of Housecraft in the elementary schools at the time. Housecraft was also the name initially adopted when the subject was introduced in the girls’ secondary schools (RwGD 1933-34). The name was widely used in schools, as is evident from the local syllabi of the elementary and secondary schools. However, the appellations ‘Housecraft’ and ‘Domestic Science’ were used interchangeably in many reports and syllabi (see for instance, RwGD 1947-48; Girls’ Secondary Schools Syllabus, 1949-50). An analysis of the foreign examinations taken by the students in Maltese girls’ schools revealed an interesting evolution of the name. Lately, the subsequent changes in name were influenced by the name changes made by foreign examination boards.

The changes in nomenclature given to the discipline is also reflected in the changes in the name of the subjects’ associations in different countries, as shown in Diagram 3.2. Currently, in the UK, there is no Home Economics professional organisation, although the International Federation of Home Economics (IFHE) has a UK section. The IFHE has been the only international organisation with a special focus on Home Economics and Consumer Studies ever since it was established 1908.



**Diagram 3.2:** An overview of the different names given to the various Home Economics Associations in the US, Britain and Malta.

### The name in examinations and syllabi

As Goodson (1993) observed, subject name change is also reflected in the name given to particular disciplines by examination boards. Whenever there was a change in the name of a domestic subject, there were also subsequent modifications to the corresponding syllabus, with very few exceptions. Therefore, the name changes that occurred in examination syllabi in subjects related to domestic subjects sheds further light on the changes that took place in Britain and in Malta. Table 3.2 shows the various names used in the GCE syllabi of the University of Oxford Delegacy of Examinations over the years.

Initially, Maltese students sat for the Oxford School Certificate, which eventually gave place to the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination (RwDE 1948-54). It was only in 1989 that a local examinations board was set up. When the Maltese examination system established by the MATSEC Board completely replaced the British one in 1989, students had the opportunity to sit for local examinations at SEC level in the Matriculation Certificate in the subjects. Table 3.3 gives a chronological illustration of the names given to the syllabi of domestic subjects in the Maltese examination system.

YEAR	ORDINARY LEVEL	ALTERNATIVE ORDINARY (AO)/ADVANCED SUPPLEMENTARY (AS) LEVEL	ADVANCED LEVEL
1958	Domestic Subjects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cookery</li> <li>• Needlework</li> <li>• General Housecraft</li> </ul>		Domestic Subjects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cookery</li> <li>• Needlework</li> </ul>
1962	Domestic Subjects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cookery</li> <li>• Needlework</li> <li>• Housecraft</li> </ul>		
1967			Domestic Science <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domestic Science/Cookery</li> <li>• Domestic Science/Needlework</li> </ul>
1970	Domestic Science <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domestic Science/Cookery</li> <li>• Domestic Science/Needlework</li> <li>• Domestic Science/Housecraft</li> </ul>		
1971			Home Economics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home Economics/Food and Nutrition</li> <li>• Home Economics/Dress and Fabrics</li> </ul>
1975	Domestic Subjects (Change in syllabus) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food and Nutrition</li> <li>• Needlework and Dress</li> <li>• Home Economics</li> </ul>		
1981		(AO) Home Economics Subjects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home and Community Studies</li> <li>• Food and Nutrition</li> <li>• Needlecraft</li> </ul>	Home Economics Subjects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home Economics/Food and Nutrition</li> <li>• Home Economics/Dress and Fabrics</li> </ul>
1982	Domestic Subjects (Change in syllabus) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food and Nutrition</li> <li>• Needlework and Dress</li> <li>• Home Economics</li> </ul>		
1988*	University of London School Examination Board (ULSEB) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home Economics</li> <li>• Needlecraft and Dress</li> </ul>	(AO) Home Economics Subjects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home and Community Studies</li> <li>• Food and Nutrition</li> </ul>	
1990		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (AS)Nutrition and Food Science</li> <li>• (AS) Design and Textiles</li> </ul>	Home Economics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrition and Food Science</li> <li>• Design and Textiles</li> </ul>

\* The University of Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations no longer offered the subjects at Ordinary level.

**Table 3.2:** An overview of the changes in names of the various syllabi and examinations offered by the University of Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations (University of Oxford Delegacy of Examination. *GCE, Regulations*, 1958-1967. University of Oxford Delegacy of Examination. *GCE, Regulations and Syllabuses*, 1968-1974).



YEAR	SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE (SEC)	INTERMEDIATE LEVEL	ADVANCED LEVEL
1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home Economics</li> <li>• Needlecraft and Dress</li> </ul>	-	-
1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home Economics</li> <li>• Textiles and Design*</li> </ul>	-	Home Economics and Human Ecology
2003		Home Economics and Human Ecology	

\*Needlecraft and Dress had its name changed to Textiles and Design

**Table 3.3:** The names of the subjects' syllabi in the Maltese examination system since 1993 (MATSEC Examinations Board, 1991; 1994a; 1994b; 1994c; 2001).

### 3.8 Conclusion

The long history of domestic subjects in education, which started at the end of the nineteenth century in the USA, has been characterized by struggles for academic assertion and relevance in the school curriculum, as well as identity crises that had a crucial impact on their evolution. Difficulties in establishing a definition of the nature of domestic subjects led many a layperson to equate these disciplines with cooking and sewing. They were seen as a means to perpetuate the traditional role of females in society, a scope whose value underwent a radical change during the twentieth century. The subjects' traditional gender specificity, coupled with the low priority given to female and vocational education for many a decade, gave them a low status which the subjects' communities sought to redress. Such efforts triggered numerous and often contentious discussions and debates in various countries, especially in the US and Britain. This soul-searching process centred on three major and interrelated issues, namely status, gender and identity. The domestic and vocational nature of the subjects put them at a lower level in public appreciation with respect to the traditional academic disciplines, especially the sciences. They were associated with female academic underachievers whose fate was restricted to the home or to the most humble occupations.

The American experience showed that promoting the discipline as a practical science was not enough to establish it as an academic area of knowledge. Various attempts were made in the US at establishing a unanimously accepted name and definition that highlighted the scientific aspect of the subjects proved unsuccessful due to the latter's interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature. These attempts were also hampered by the strong critique brought forward by feminists, who advocated a radical change in the role of women in society. The feminists' vision contrasted sharply with what domestic subjects were perceived to nurture in the younger generations of females. Despite numerous name changes and revisitations of the knowledge content, efforts to make the subject more appealing to high ability students and to males did not achieve much success in raising the subjects' status and academic significance among stakeholders and education authorities.

In spite of the adoption of different names and changes in content to change the perception of academics of other disciplines and education authorities, including other stakeholders such as parents and students, the subjects still lost their ground in colleges and faculties across the US and Britain. General perception remained broadly traditional, confining the subjects to the domestic and hospitality domains.

The discussion of the recurring issues of status, gender and identity in Home Economics and Textiles Studies in the countries that have always served as a role model for the Maltese education setup also found its way to the subjects' local community. Despite Malta's traditional Mediterranean and Catholic patriarchal social structure which made it so different from those in the US and Britain, and on which feminism did not exert any significant influence, the domestic subjects' community faced the same challenges its counterparts were struggling with abroad, albeit on a different scale and in different social circumstances. The research on the local situation carried out for this study and presented in the following chapters shows how these issues were of particular concern also to the subjects' stakeholders in Malta, and how they played a crucial part in the evolution of the subjects' curriculum history on the island.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING OF THE STUDY**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter mainly focuses on the curriculum, in relation to the study of school subjects and their histories. The following literature review shall be organised into four main sections: (i) the relationship between knowledge and the curriculum mainly from the sociological and social constructionist perspectives, (ii) an analysis of the literature pertaining to curriculum history and the study of school subjects in order to trace the contribution of influential scholars in the field, and (iii) an overview of the literature on the relationship between gender and the curriculum.

#### **4.1 Knowledge, the curriculum and the sociological perspective**

The study of the curriculum has been influenced by different perspectives, with rationalists, empiricists, conventionalists, sociologists and critical theorists, social constructionists and post-modernists all contributing to the field (Kelly, 2009). These had an impact on curriculum theory and on the way the curriculum has been conceived over time. This section shall focus on specific philosophical and ideological aspects related to the curriculum, with emphasis on the social constructionist perspective in curriculum research. It shall serve as a basis for identifying various key issues that affected the curriculum development of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, research was undertaken on the curriculum as a ‘social construct’ at a time of great turbulence in the field of education, particularly regarding the curriculum. Academics in the field of sociology of education were influenced by neo-Marxism, interactionism and sociology of knowledge. Their main concerns were ‘the processes of educational transmission’ (Ball, 2004, p. 4). The neo-Marxists focused on the relations between the reproduction of social classes within the schools, the types of experiences gained and skills acquired by the students. The interactionists were interested in describing the social identities of the teachers and their pupils, through ethnographically-based studies which were focused within schools. On their part, the sociologists of education were mainly concerned with knowledge and the curriculum, focusing on the social construction of the curriculum

and later the historical and political influences exerted on school subjects, including status and content (Ball, 2004).

For the sociologists, knowledge is a consequence of human intervention. According to Young (1971a), the sociologists were unable to problematise the curriculum and accepted the conventionalist view. Young argued in favour of human knowledge as being socially constructed and not as 'given' and that it cannot be understood through a philosophical analysis. He challenged the notion that the curriculum is a structure of knowledge that can be passed on to others. He criticised Hirst's 'forms of knowledge' as these were similar to the areas of the traditional academic curriculum. Young argued that these forms 'justify, rather than examine, what are no more than the socio-historical constructs of a particular time' (Young, 1971, p. 23).

School subjects have always been the channels through which knowledge is transmitted in formal education. Interest in the origins of school subjects, especially on how and what brought about the establishment of school subjects, initiated by Foster Watson as early as 1909 and was rekindled by scholars such as Musgrove (1968) and Bernstein (1971) many years later. Musgrove urged educational researchers to view the subject:

[...] both within the school and the nation at large as social systems sustained by communication networks, material endowments, and ideologies (Musgrove, 1968, p. 101).

Bernstein (1971) emphasised that power is exerted by society over what constitutes 'educational knowledge' (p. 47). He discussed the relationship between the contents of subjects, including their boundaries, and the status given to them. Bernstein explained that the time allocated to different subjects and the labels given to their content, for example whether optional or compulsory can be seen to influence subject status. Moreover he acknowledged the importance of the types of confines that exist between subjects. He further emphasised the relationship between subjects and knowledge found outside the school.

Young (1971b) posed questions about the meaning of knowledge and the availability of such knowledge in the curriculum. He argued that one can comprehend how knowledge is constructed by looking at the social conditions that influence it. Young

was later influenced by the work of other important sociologists, including Bernstein, Marx and Bourdieu (Young, 1977), and he maintained this sociological perspective of knowledge rather than the philosophical view. He strove to show how the curriculum is constructed, organised and controlled. Young (1971a, 1998) stated that those individuals who hold influential positions tend to control knowledge which is disseminated among the members of society. He argued that various groups of people tend to have different access to various areas of knowledge. These issues, together with the social context in which individuals opt for particular areas of knowledge, are the basis for the approach to the curriculum as being 'socially organized knowledge' (Young, 1998, p. 14). This approach led to three other dimensions of curriculum organisation; (a) the importance or value that is given to the various components of the curriculum, (b) the extent to which subjects are offered to particular groups of people and (c) the connection between these subject areas and those individuals who have a right to opt for them (Young, 1998). Young believed that various groups within a society have significant influence on the content and form of a particular curriculum. He argued that a change in the form of the curriculum could lead to a change in society, although he acknowledged that dominant groups within the society are likely to challenge this attempt.

Other sociologists of education had similar views and claimed that the curriculum is socially constructed. Blum (1971) declared that the curriculum is a result of the ideas put forward by particular social groups. In addition, he argued that this type of curriculum:

[...] is viewed not as a product of the 'factual', 'real' character of the world, but rather, as an outcome of the commonsense theorizing that occurs in the process of organizing and applying some description to the world (Blum, 1971, p. 117).

In his seminal work on the evolution of the American school curriculum from a historical perspective, Kliebard (1977) also raised several other questions related to the curriculum. His fundamental epistemological question was: What should be taught in schools? This raises other related issues, such as (a) the rationale behind what is included in the curriculum and what is left out, (b) who gets access to certain knowledge, and who controls what is selected and taught, (c) the long term effect of what is presented in the curriculum and (d) the relationship between the subjects

provided. Apart from these issues which dealt with the epistemological, political and technical aspects, Kliebard acknowledged the strength of the traditional school subjects by his describing it as ‘one fortress that proved virtually impregnable’ (Kliebard, 2004, p. 269).

Lawton (1975) viewed the curriculum from a different perspective. He stated that the curriculum is ‘a selection from the culture of a society’ and that ‘certain aspects of our way of life, certain kinds of knowledge, certain attitudes and values are regarded as so important’ that the members of a society have to pass it on to the next generation (p. 6). Lawton argued that schools are responsible for the transmission of a culture and the role of teachers is an important aspect in the decision-making process. Teachers have to consider their own cultural and philosophical beliefs in order to bring about the required changes and additions to the curriculum (Lawton, 1983).

Transmission of culture and decision-taking in education are closely linked to the relationship between power and knowledge (see Foucault, 1977; Apple, 1979/1990). There is a strong relationship between power and knowledge in society and there cannot be knowledge without power and vice-versa (Foucault, 1977). Foucault stated that:

[...] power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (1977, p. 27).

He further stated that power and knowledge are fused together and interdependent on one another (Foucault, 1980). The main concept of Foucault’s perception on the relation between power and knowledge was that power is dispersed among society as a whole and in different complex forms (Foucault, 1982). This challenges the traditional liberal view that power is available to a number of individuals, groups or organisation and is forced upon others (Blacker, 1998). Foucault defined power as ‘relations, a more-or-less organised, hierarchical cluster of relations’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 189). In this way, power is diffused in every situation, even in relations occurring among members of society and institutions.

On his part, Apple (1979/1990) adopted a neo-Marxist perspective in his analysis of

the relationship between knowledge and power. He sought to inquire about who represents the particular knowledge that is present in the school curriculum (1979/1990), that is, the influence exerted by various groups which have particular ideologies, and/or other societal, economic and cultural forces (Apple, 2008). He was also particularly interested in the legitimacy of the content and form of knowledge found in schools.

#### **4.2 The social constructionist perspective in curriculum studies**

The curriculum reforms that took place during the 1960s and early 1970s were aptly described by Goodson (1994) as ‘a sort of tidal wave’. According to him:

[...] the waves created turbulence and activity but actually they only engulfed a few small islands; more substantial land masses were hardly affected at all, and on dry land the mountains, the high ground, remained completely untouched. As the tide now rapidly recedes the high ground can be seen in stark silhouette (p. 17).

It was a time of social change, and several scholars and curriculum reform movements were seeking to create drastic changes in the school curricula. For instance, a number of projects initiated by School Councils in England were being established in schools. Their focus was to prevent inequality among pupils which was one of the major concerns of the teachers at that time. Teachers viewed the nature of the curriculum as creating inequality and hence were inadequate for their pupils. These projects were aimed at providing a curriculum which promoted more equality among students, an issue which in the past was largely overlooked (Kelly, 2009). However, the ‘high ground’, the prescribed curriculum, and other well-established areas that formed part of the curriculum were unlikely to be challenged (Goodson, 1992a, 1994).

The social constructionists viewed the curriculum as being socially constructed and believed that it could not be considered as ‘neutral’ (Apple, 1979/1990, p. 17; Goodson, 1994, p. 16). The curriculum is the result of ideas put forward by individuals with different ideological backgrounds, sometimes having vested interests or hidden agendas that succeed in being represented on the curriculum. The school curriculum is created for a specific society and at a particular time, where ‘experts’ responsible for its construction are influenced socially and politically. The social constructionists were concerned with the reification of knowledge. They posed questions related to

the construction and implementation of the curriculum at various levels of the education system. These academics were concerned with the distinction made between 'high-status' and 'low-status' knowledge and who has access to either of these two types of knowledge (Hargreaves, 1994).

Goodson was one of the pioneers in studying the curriculum from the social constructionist perspective. He was dissatisfied with the way the curriculum was being studied and with the type of curriculum theories being developed. In these theories, the curriculum was mainly being considered as prescription; in other words, 'the expertise and control reside within central governments, educational bureaucracies or university communities' (Goodson and Walker, 1991, p. 169). The main focus of the social constructionists was on the school classroom, the place where the prescribed curriculum was being negotiated and implemented. The prescribed curriculum was not considered as a relevant area of study. Hence, Goodson, among other academics, endeavoured to study the curriculum as a social construction by focusing on a:

[...] combined approach: a focus on the construction of prescriptive curricula and policy coupled with an analysis of the negotiations and realization of that prescribed curriculum, focusing on the essentially dialectical relationship of the two (Goodson, 1994, p. 112).

This dual focus is fundamental for a study on the social construction of school subjects. The move from a single focus toward the effective development of research on the social construction of the prescribed and interactive levels of the curriculum was important for the social constructionist perspective.

#### **4.2.1 Studying the curriculum from a historical perspective**

Any analysis of the literature pertaining to the establishment and evolution of school subjects must necessarily take into account their curriculum history. Goodson (1984) considered historical studies of the social construction of school curricula as vital, as they provide a better insight on the subjects' curricula from their inception, how they changed over time and survived the challenges posed by other subjects. Earlier Young (1977) had argued that one of the basic components of the study of school knowledge should be historical work, as in order to understand the issues related to politics and control, there is a need to localise current educational problems historically. Franklin and Johnson (2008) held the same view, and presented their historical work on the



curriculum in America since the 1950s as a tool which could help ‘make some predictions of the future’ (p. 474).

The arguments proposed by Popkewitz (1987) were similar to Goodson’s (1988) in that an historical analysis of the evolution of a school subject is insignificant if it fails to address the social, cultural, economic and political contexts. Popkewitz stated that:

Most histories of the formation of the school subjects ignore these relations by locating the broadening of the curriculum . . . to the formal functioning of professional committees and administrative problems of schools [...] (Popkewitz, 1987, pp. 3-4).

Unlike historians of education who accept the school as a ‘black box’ (Goodson and Anstead, 1994, p. 51), social constructionists seek to examine the internal patterns of schooling (Goodson, 1995, p. 40) which are created by the way education and schooling interact with society and the economy. These internal issues have to be analysed and studied in a historical context (Goodson, 1994, p. 52). Earlier Blumer (1969) had emphasised that there is a need to identify the link that exists with the past. This link with history is vital as ‘the designations and interpretations through which people form and maintain their organised relations are always in degree of carry-over from the past’ (Blumer, 1986, p. 60).

Goodson (1988) argued that historical research would enable us to recognise the roots of the existing curriculum which are located in a historical context. By analysing the past, the researcher can illuminate the current curriculum and on any struggles that have developed in particular events. Goodson further explains that:

These contexts and constraints need to be examined in relationship to contemporary action. Moreover, we need a dynamic model of how syllabuses, pedagogy, finances, resources, selection, the economy all interrelate. We cannot, in short, view the curriculum (and its associated historical contexts and constraints) as a bounded system (Goodson, 1988, p. 54).

#### **4.2.2 Studying school subjects**

The school curriculum is often viewed as a collection of a range of school subjects which are put together in order to provide pupils with knowledge and skills. In the past, scholars have shown their concern as to what subjects are included in the

curriculum and what is left out (Phenix, 1964; Musgrove, 1968; Hirst and Peters, 1970; Bernstein, 1971; Young, 1977). Historically, certain school subjects were viewed as having a legitimate right to be present in the curriculum, while other subjects were considered as being less important or as being marginal. In various Western countries, America, England and Australia, including Malta, the school curriculum has always been an issue of many debates. The school curriculum became a bone of contention when it was brought on the agendas of political parties and became a 'national curriculum' backed by legislation (Goodson, 1992b).

Goodson and Marsh (1996) described the school subject as a 'block in a mosaic painstakingly constructed over the centuries' (p.150). They argued that the school subject is just one prism which forms part of a larger prism that gives meaning to the social significance of schooling. They also stated that studies of school subjects generate 'justificatory discourses or 'regimes of truth' for the organisation of school knowledge' (p. 3). They argued that research on the content knowledge of school subjects often presume that teachers can adapt and control the content in order to suit their pedagogical practices. However, Goodson and Marsh emphasised that:

Studying school subjects as dominant discourses implies that they, themselves, set parameters for practice. In this sense, the preactive definition of school subjects is a crucial part of understanding 'the terms of engagement' within the schooling (p. 3).

The importance of conducting research on the preactive meanings of the school curriculum on different levels was seen to shed light on the critical relationship between the written curriculum and the interactive implementation in the classroom (Goodson and Marsh, 1996). The preactive level is the phase when the curriculum is in its prescribed form and is 'the visible and public testimony of selected rationales and legitimating rhetoric for schooling' (Goodson, 1991, p. 60). Goodson (1995) contended that much of the power struggles among interested parties occurs during the preactive phase, when syllabi and course descriptions are being drawn.

The evolution of the curriculum of school subjects has attracted a number of scholars who try to analyse the roots of what constitutes the current situation of a specific subject in a particular educational system. Kliebard (2004) analysed the American curriculum from 1893 till 1958. His main concern was on the curriculum reforms that

took place and the struggles made by the different interest groups over the curriculum during the sixty-five year span. Franklin and Johnson (2008) focused their study on the social history of the American curriculum since 1950. Their focus was on classroom pedagogies and the conflicts that surrounded the American curriculum during the period under study.

Specific research related to the study of school subjects in the preactive stage has been carried out by various scholars (see for instance, Goodson, 1983, 1985; Kirk, 1992; Jephcote and Davies, 2007). Several other studies related to the evolution of school subjects have also been conducted in many countries. In North America, a number of papers collected by Tom Popkewitz (1987) looked into the curriculum history of Biology, Mathematics and Social Studies in the USA, while Rowell and Gaskell in Goodson (1988) focused on the history of school Physics. Clark (1991) tracked the emergence of Art in Canada. In Asia, Yung Chan (2005) and Ma and Pendergast (2011) studied the historical significance of Home Economics in Hong Kong, Yueh, Cowie, Barker and Jones (2010) focused on Environmental Education in Taiwan. In South America Viviani (2005) analysed Biology through a social, political and professional perspective in a Brazilian school. In Australia, the curriculum history of Physical Education was the main focus of Kirk (1998), while Green and Beavis (1996) published a collection of papers about the English curriculum. In New Zealand, the evolution of Social Studies in secondary school was studied by Taylor (2006). In Scandinavia, Mork (2007) focused on music as a school subject in Norway and Hallström (2010a) studied the roots of civic education which led to the introduction of technology as a school subject in Sweden.

In his work on Biology, Geography and Rural Studies, Goodson (1983) sought to go further in developing and establishing theories on what influence the emergence and development of school subjects. He focused on the evolution of these school subjects and how they brought about the emergence of Environmental Studies. His main concern was to understand the process of the formation of a school subject, including the patterns of social change. He investigated the way the subjects pursued status and resources, and how groups and associations endeavoured to achieve academic recognition for their particular subjects.

Goodson's findings shed light on the importance of focusing on the micro-level of the

curriculum. However, one cannot deny the importance given to the macro-level, that is, the broader aspect of the curriculum, the educational system of the country, the socio-economic changes and other factors that have a direct or indirect influential affect. Goodson's argument was:

[...] to seek to provide from the macro-level theories of curriculum without related empirical studies of how the curriculum has been negotiated at micro-level over time is a dangerous sequence through which to proceed (Goodson, 1984, p. 27).

My investigation aims to focus on the micro and macro level of the Home Economics and Textiles Studies curriculum, as one cannot study the evolution of a school subject without delving into the social, economic and political context in which historical moments took place.

#### **4.2.3 The concept of refraction and adaptation**

The process of refraction elaborated by Goodson and Rudd (2012) describes how policies are reinterpreted and redirected as required at national and local level. They argue that refraction in education:

[...] may be seen as a change in direction arising from individuals' and groups' own beliefs, practice and trajectories that are at odds with dominant waves of reform and policies introduced into the field. This type of 'bending' or mediation occurs in various ways and for numerous reasons and must be viewed as crucial elements for analysis, as not only do they highlight alternative and pre-figurative antecedents, forms and models of practice, they also illustrate the interaction between ideology and structures and individual and collective practice and action (p. 5).

In order to identify instances of refraction in education, the researcher must contextualise and analyse the reforms that took place during the broader historical period under focus (Goodson and Rudd, 2012). By focusing on a particular historical period, one can analyse the context from a socio-historical perspective under which the changes in education policy and practice occurred. However, a consideration of the reaction of the 'actors', those who were involved in the process, and their subjective interpretation of the 'development of structures, organisations and practice' is also significant (Goodson and Rudd, 2012, p. 9). Therefore, the concept of refraction attempts to analyse the relationship between the various 'points of

refraction' which comprise the various levels of the structure of the education system (Goodson and Rudd, 2012, p. 13).

In other words, this concept of refraction provides the possibility of exploring the relationship between the macro aspects of the curriculum, which identify the dominant ideologies and discourse, and the micro level, which consists of their application in the classroom. Analysing the domestic studies' syllabi from such a perspective allows the researcher to capture the moments in history where the relationship between the dominant British ideologies filtered through the curriculum and influenced the Maltese interpretation of the British models.

#### **4.2.4 Layton's Model**

When studying school subjects, one may seek to identify the reasons why a particular school subject was established, how it attained its status as an accepted subject, and who promoted it. In the early 1970s, Layton (1972) studied the evolution of Science in England from the nineteenth century onwards, and proposed a three-tiered stage model for the evolution of a school subject in the secondary school:

In the first [stage], the callow intruder stakes a place in the time-table, justifying its presence on grounds such as pertinence and utility. During this stage learners are attracted to the subject because of its bearing on matters of concern to them. The teachers are rarely trained specialists, but bring the missionary enthusiasm of pioneers to their task. The dominant criterion is relevance to the needs and interests of the learners.

In the second stage, a tradition of scholarly work in the subject is emerging along with a corps of trained specialists from which teachers may be recruited. Students are still attracted to the study, but as much by its reputation and growing academic status as by its relevance to their own problems and concerns. The internal logic and discipline of the subject is becoming increasingly influential in the selection and organisation of subject matter.

The third stage is characterised by a further advance along the road of specialisation and expertise. The teachers now constitute a professional body with established rules and values. The selection of subject matter is determined in large measure by the judgements and practices of the specialist scholars who lead inquires in the field. Students are initiated into a tradition, their attitudes approaching passivity and resignation, a prelude to disenchantment (Layton, 1972, p. 11).

This sociological model will serve as one of the foundations of this study's theoretical framework, as it allows the researcher to reflect upon events and attitudes concerning the establishment and evolution of school subjects. Consequently, it was deemed a useful model by which to analyse and evaluate the various developments in the history of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta. Layton's proposed model cautioned researchers that school subjects should not be studied in isolation. It is necessary to investigate school subjects from a socio-historical perspective in order to identify the reasons underlying their presence in the school curriculum (Goodson, 1983). In his work, Goodson analysed Layton's model and further developed and applied it to his own research projects (1985, 1988). For this reason, Goodson's theories on the curriculum history of school subjects in the UK also served to develop further my theoretical framework. In his work, Goodson (1983) identified three main hypotheses to examine the historical origins and evolution of Geography, Rural Studies and Biology which eventually led to development of Environmental Studies. These hypotheses assume that:

- (i) [S]ubjects should not be viewed as monolithic entities but as social communities containing groups with conflicting loyalties and intentions and with variable and changing boundaries (Goodson, 1983, p. 37).
- (ii) [S]ubject groups pursuing the material interests of their members will move progressively away from utilitarian and pedagogical traditions and promote themselves as 'academic' subjects (Goodson, 1983, p. 37).
- (iii) Much of the curriculum debate can be interpreted in terms of conflict between subjects over status, resources and territory (Goodson, 1983, p. 3).

The above hypotheses led to the development of theories used by researchers studying school subjects in order to substantiate their findings (e.g. Paechter, 2000; Yung Chan, 2005; Jephcote and Davies, 2007). Work conducted by other academics, such as Reid (1984), also contributed further issues in the field. On the basis of his research on studying school subjects from sociological perspectives, Reid argued that both external and internal forces of the educational system have an influence on the emergence of subjects and their evolution over time. These macro-level forces are often powerful enough to change the course of the evolution and establishment of a school subject. For instance, the study conducted by Purvis (1985) on the history of domestic subjects in England from 1870 to 1944, showed that cultural and political influences were the forces that manipulated the establishment and development of these subjects. These

bore similarities to my findings on domestic subjects in Malta during the same period (Portelli, 1996), and also to those of Yung Chan (2005) in her historical study on Home Economics in Hong Kong. In both of these studies, colonial influences also appeared to have had a very strong effect on the education systems of Malta and Hong Kong, both British colonies in the period under consideration. This historical fact had a direct impact on Home Economics education in both countries.

#### **4.2.5 Issues of subject status**

School subjects are hierarchically structured according to status. The status gained by a subject is rooted in the particular position acquired at the elementary/primary sector of education (Goodson, 1993). Ball (1987) argued that once the status of a subject is established in the school curriculum, it becomes very problematic to modify. Studies have indicated that the status of school subjects has been linked with a number of factors. These include: (i) the material interests of the main stakeholders, the teachers, i.e. remuneration, career prospects, and resources assigned for teaching purposes (Goodson and Anstead, 1994; Goodson, 1998); (ii) the value given to it by others, the sense of authority gained over the subject knowledge and the future career opportunities for the subject's students (Goodson and Anstead, 1994); and (iii) the professional status of the subject's teaching body (Goodson, 1998).

Subjects are accorded high or low status depending on whether they are viewed as being academic or practically/vocationally-oriented. High status subjects are considered academic and are linked with university degrees, while low status subjects are those that do not satisfy the requirements of the academic criteria usually accorded only to high status subjects. Goodson (1983) identified three main traditions when studying the styles present in the school curriculum - the academic, the utilitarian and the pedagogical traditions. The academic tradition is related to subjects focusing on the 'abstract and theoretical knowledge' which is examinable (Goodson, 1983, p. 27). Subjects granted high status have a significant connection with the 'academic tradition' and more able students sit for their examinations. The utilitarian tradition focuses more on the low status (Goodson, 1983; 1985), entailing practical and common sense knowledge which attract less able students lead to technical vocations. Historically, in the English curriculum, the utilitarian tradition overlapped with the pedagogical tradition, in that it focused on child-centred pedagogical styles used to help the child

be actively involved, to investigate and discover knowledge rather than being a 'passive recipient' of knowledge (Goodson, 1983, p. 30). The pedagogical tradition was also considered to be of low status.

The examination structure has a strong bearing on the status allocated to certain subjects. Whether subjects are examinable or not, has a direct influence on their status (Goodson, 1983). Historically, able or academically promising students followed academic examination subjects and this seems to have occurred predominantly in England and her colonies (see Goodson, 1983; 1998; Portelli, 1996; Yung Chan, 2005). The 'triple alliance' of able students, academic subjects and their examinations, favoured higher status subjects (Goodson, 1988, p. 140). The ambition of the lower status subjects is to acquire a foothold in national examinations as this would uplift their position in the school curriculum. However, as Goodson (1983) rightly pointed out, without the representation of subject specialists on specific educational boards to exert influence in favour of their subject, the latter's status tends to suffer. Hence, public examinations may be considered as the tools that judge the importance of a subject, as certification may guarantee higher status, especially in higher education institutions.

The relationship between the academic status granted to examinable subjects that are taught to able students and the allocation of resources provided is considered to be the main aspiration of teachers and subjects' associations for their subject to acquire academic status (Goodson, 1998). Goodson appropriately described this as a 'battle over the material resources and the career prospects of each subject teacher or subject community' (Goodson, 1998, p. 35). He argued that although dominant forces may seem to have a strong influence on the status of school subjects:

[h]igh status academic knowledge gains its adherents and aspirants less through control of the curricula ... than through re-established connection with patterns of resource allocation and the associated work and career prospects these ensure (Goodson, 1998, p. 36).

Universities are arenas where competing interests play a major role in the struggle over power, resources and legitimacy (Meyer et al., 1994; Goodson, 1994). These not only promote degrees and courses but favour ones that have long been established, such as medicine, law and the arts, as was the case in Malta during the early twentieth century.



University admission policies are also influential in giving preferential treatment to certain degree courses over others (Reid 1972) and in confirming the hierarchy of subjects. In his study, Reid (1972) found that universities often sustain well-established studies but 'practical and aesthetic subjects are accorded sharply lower recognition' (Reid, 1972, p.49).

Pupils' perception and gender are also considered an attributing factor towards the status of school subjects. Measor (1984) declared that the pupils' point of view may influence the status of a subject. In her study conducted in the 1980s, she argued that pupils attribute different meanings to the different aspects of the school curriculum, this leading to differing subject status. Measor found that youngsters are influenced by 'gender codes about certain activities', 'adolescent culture', 'social class', 'ethnic origins' and job prospects which have a bearing on the subjects' status (Measor, 1984, p. 201). It was evident from her study, that gender was also deemed a significant factor in determining subject value. Pupils attributed low value to subjects such as Domestic Science, as they enhanced their cultural gender roles. Pupils also valued the link between the utility of the subject and job prospects. They considered the status given to subjects depending on their aspirations and the opportunity of following a career, or gaining employment upon leaving school. Measor also pointed out that the subject status effects the way pupils collaborate with the subject teacher. The influence of the subject status on the pupils puts constraints on the performance of the teacher in class and on the amount of work accomplished during the lessons (Measor, 1984).

Clear subject boundaries affect the status of school subjects (Bernstein, 1971; Whitty et al., 1994; Paechter, 2000). The subject's 'territory' is a highly sensitive area and key promoters of the subject (Goodson, 1983, p. 3), including teachers and experts in the field, do their utmost to protect it from other subjects. Teachers of high status subjects ensure that lower status subjects do not interfere with the content of their subject areas (Whitty et al., 1994). However this premise cannot be applied the other way round; lower status subjects have a marginal influence on their boundaries, as is the case for Home Economics and Textiles Studies. When Design and Technology (D&T) was introduced in the British school curriculum in 1989, it included aspects of food and textile technology taken from Home Economics and Needlework. This was possible because these two subjects were perceived as less relevant to society, and eventually

they fell victim to a ‘slow death’ in British education (Paechter 2000; Owen-Jackson, 2008).

The theoretical framework proposed by Bernstein in his work *On Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge* (1971) suggests that the collection and the integrated type of educational codes can be used to distinguish curricula. In the collection codes, the boundaries between the subjects are ‘strong’ and impermeable, while in the integrated codes, the boundaries are ‘weak’ and permeable. He viewed classification and framing as the key concepts that can describe these educational codes. He refers to classification as the relationship between contents found in the curriculum and the strength of the boundaries that are created and maintained between subjects. Framing is used to refer to the way knowledge is transmitted, the pedagogies used to transmit the knowledge. Ross (2000), following Bernstein argued that with strong classification of subjects in a content-based curriculum, hierarchy among subjects is unavoidable:

Strong classification is usually linked to strong framing and strong framing creates school structures that favour hierarchical structures of departmentalism. Departments focused around subjects inevitably jockey with each other for resources and status, and generate rhetorical statements that bolster their subject’s credentials at the expense of others (Ross, 2000, p. 110).

Merging of departments at university also create tension for subject area specialists (for instance see, Harvey et al., 2002, for a detailed account of a departmental merge in Australian universities in the 1990s). The provision of an interdisciplinary approach of subject areas and the blurring of the subject boundaries could create an effect on the status of the subjects involved and may cascade further down to the secondary schools (Harvey et al., 2002).

#### **4.2.6 Subject communities**

The vital role of subject associations or communities has been brought to light by a number of studies (see Goodson, 1983; 1985; Layton 1984; Ball, 1983; Yung Chan, 2005; Jephcote and Davies, 2007; Hallström 2010a and 2010b). Goodson (1983) described subjects’ associations as ‘[...] a formal arena wherein sub-groups can promote their varied interests and where the arguments about curriculum traditions can

be pursued' (p. 28).

School subject associations are a 'loose amalgamation of segments' with specific interests and missions (Bucher and Strauss, 1961, p. 326). These subject associations are established or more active during difficult times, for instance during periods of disputes over resources and curricular changes, training and recruitment (Bucher and Strauss, 1961). They strive to work for the material interests of their members, and in the process, they tend to shift their interest 'from the utilitarian and pedagogical traditions' and instead promote the academic tradition (Goodson, 1983, p. 37). Goodson (1983; 1988) argued that in this way, the association would be striving to promote its subject as an academic discipline which in turn would acquire respect and resources. Hallström (2010b), reporting a statement made by a board member of the Swedish Biology Teachers Association, also highlighted the point that the subjects' territory is the most important work that every subject association should pursue. However, the members of these subject communities may not necessarily share the same ideologies and interests, and they may not be considered as homogeneous in nature (Goodson, 1988; Jephcote and Davies, 2007; Knight, 1996).

The work of Jephcote and Davies (2007) on Economics and subject communities also highlights the involvement of these factions within these school subjects' communities. The authors argued that the concerns of these sub-groups are only a short-term reaction to 'prevailing conditions' (p. 224). In their study, the researchers found that the Economics community consisted of factions that rather than change in the way the subject is conceptualized, focused their debates on aspects of subject content and pedagogies. The role of these subject communities is to aid transformation and respond to the needs of its members.

Knight (1996) examined two associations of school subjects, the Geography Association and the National Association of Teachers of Home Economics and Technology (NATHE) during a time of uncertainty. The study highlighted the roles of the subjects' associations and the diverse views of their members, who struggled to justify the inclusion of their subjects as a separate subject from others on the National Curriculum in England. Knight pointed out to the political alliances that these associations formed in order to exert power to promote the Associations arguments, an issue also mentioned by Hallström (2010a). In certain instances the subjects'

associations fail to guarantee the status of the subject and the occupation of its members. Although the main role of the subject association is to disseminate subject content knowledge and ideas for innovative and successful pedagogies through in-service courses, publications and journals, in those turbulent times their members would have appreciated any effort made by the Association to influence curriculum development and reform (Knight, 1996).

#### **4.3 The gendered nature of school subjects and option choices**

Particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, one of the main concerns of many feminists and female academics regarding the school curriculum was subject choice and its impact on the career prospects of male and female students (Weiner, 2010). In the United Kingdom, the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 and the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 were both influential in narrowing the gender gap that existed in the curriculum in British schools. Various studies show how in the past, boys generally opted for male-oriented subjects while girls chose more female-oriented ones (Grafton et al., 1983; Measor, 1983; Purvis, 1984; Waring, 1985; Arnot et al., 1998; Francis, 2000). Despite the Sex Discrimination Act, however, in the early 1990s most school subjects were still oriented towards male students (Measor and Sikes 1992a). Moreover, the establishment of compulsory subjects in British schools brought about by the National Curriculum reduced the sex-segregation of subjects and aimed at improving social equality (Arnot et al., 1998), despite fears that the National Curriculum would have created social inequality instead (e.g. Miles and Middleton, 1990; Shah, 1990; Measor and Sikes, 1992a). In fact, when subject choice was re-introduced within the National Curriculum, students once again opted for gender-stereotyped subjects (Whitehead, 1996; Arnot et al., 1999).

Research conducted by Darmanin (1991) in Maltese schools revealed similar results to those found by Arnot et al. (1998) in England relating to gender differences in subject choice in schools. At the time of Darmanin's study, all Maltese state, church and private secondary schools had been following a single-sex system that allowed the implementation of a differentiated curriculum for boys and girls. Darmanin argued that there were several factors that constructed differentiation in Maltese schools, including 'the actual provision of options, teachers' and guidance teachers ideologies, the gendered profession and the packaging of curriculum material' (Darmanin, 1991, p.

132). In 1988, the government's initiative to offer girls the opportunity to take trade subjects in the local boys' trade schools proved unsuccessful, since the girls' main aspirations were to find employment in traditional female-oriented occupations, such as retail work or hairdressing. Moreover, the girls were uncomfortable with the prospect of having to attend lessons at a boys' trade school. The curriculum in girls' trade schools included Home Economics, Personal Care, Tailoring and Woodwork, so the authorities made a tentative effort to offer girls Woodwork, a traditionally male-oriented subject, as a concrete first attempt at creating a less gendered curriculum. However, this proved a failure as the girls considered Woodwork a boys' subject and were reluctant to attend Woodwork lessons (Darmanin, 1991). As shown in the following chapters, offering traditionally female-oriented subjects such as Home Economics also had its problems, since overcoming long ingrained gender related perceptions takes time.

Since the 1970s, the general trend in education has been to guarantee equal access and opportunities, and the means to reach this objective has been identified in the removal of gender bias in the curriculum, since the latter has an important role in developing the capability of students (Marshall and Arnot, 2008). A gender sensitive curriculum offers 'girls agency and autonomy, aspiration and voice' (p. 4), thus affecting their future career choices.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed several aspects related to the curriculum and social constructionist perspective. They provide a basis for my research on the Maltese context which, due to the long-standing British influence on Maltese public policy-making, offers many opportunities for comparative analysis. For this investigation, I shall apply the social constructionist approach to the study of school subjects, in this case Home Economics and Textiles Studies. By analysing their historical development throughout these past decades, I aim to identify the influences and changes that took place in the subjects' curriculum between 1960 and 2010. An analysis of government policies and the narratives of subjects' teachers who experienced such changes shall bring into focus the relation of the past with the present of the subjects' status and significance. Goodson's theories on the social construction of school subjects and Layton's model on the different stages of evolution of school

subjects discussed earlier in this chapter shall serve as the main theoretical framework for the study.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research design, the sources and methods used to gather the necessary data and the justification of the research techniques employed for this investigation. I illustrate my reasons for choosing an autoethnographic, qualitative approach, and the issues concerning my role as an insider, together with its ethical implications. I proceed to illustrate the data sources and tools deemed appropriate for the study, namely research of material sources (printed documents, photographs and artefacts), life history, semi-structured interviews and online focus group discussions, and non-participant observations. A discussion of the ethical issues faced accompanies each data collection technique used during my research. Further ethical considerations concern the strategies adopted during the planning and the implementation phases of the study.

#### **5.1 The research design**

##### **5.1.1 The research approach**

When conducting research in a familiar setting and among colleagues, a number of issues emerge that can have a direct influence on the research process. My background and experience in the field had a significant importance in this investigation. My investigation is ethnographic and autoethnographic in nature, as it focuses on the life experiences of individuals who were or are still part of the Home Economics and Textiles Studies community, and I integrate the data collected with my experiences as a member of the same group. My decision to conduct research as an insider was mainly influenced by (a) interest in the community; (b) relatively easy access to the setting; (c) limited time available to study an unknown community; and (d) inadequate funds available to conduct research overseas. All of these reasons had a varying degree of influence on the rationale for planning and executing my research in this way.

Taylor (2011) uses the term ‘intimate insider’ when referring to an insider who is doing research in their own ‘backyard’ (p. 9). She contends that the relationships of the researcher with the participants are often deeply rooted in the field, the researcher’s role is highly visible and is aware of unrecorded knowledge of the community under

study. As Taylor rightly argued, when the researcher forms part of his/her own research, this process of intimate insiderness could represent autoethnography. It came very natural for me to scrutinize my personal narratives during my research journey as I always felt part of the research. I was constantly aware of my position, and sustaining a high level of reflexivity was an effective way of limiting the shortcomings of being an insider. Alex and Hammerström (2008) noted that reflexivity improves ‘the credibility of findings by taking into account the researcher’s values, beliefs, knowledge and biases’ (p. 170).

### Autoethnography as an approach

Autoethnography has turned out to be increasingly popular among researchers, especially those conducting insider research as it allows them to include their personal experience (Holt, 2003; Foster et al., 2005; Muncey, 2005). Originally, autoethnography was used to refer to work carried out by anthropologists conducting insider research within their own community (Hayano, 1979). Academics defined the term ‘autoethnography’ in various ways, such as ‘personal experience narratives’ (Denzin, 1989), ‘reflective ethnographies’ (Ellis and Bochner, 1996) and ‘narratives of experience’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) to mention but a few. As it developed as a research method, autoethnography shifted away from its original use, which makes a clear distinction between the data and personal experience, and acquired a postmodern stance that blurs these boundaries and allows the adoption of creative genres such as poetry, prose, photography, essays and journal entries (Muncey, 2010).

Including one’s personal experience in the study has been also highly supported by researchers such as Ellis (2004) and Griffiths (1994). By weaving one’s voice with the experiences of the participants, being an additional participant in the research, pushes further the investigation (Wall, 2006). Clandinin and Connelly (1994) argue that if the researcher eliminates one’s voice, the research just becomes a synopsis and an analysis of the data acquired from others. This made me consider my role as an insider researcher and autoethnographer, and helped me to engage in this reflexivity process.

Before I embarked on the research, I decided to write my personal narrative to reflect upon my own story, starting from my years as a secondary school student up to the present. During the thirty five years in question, I lived through various education



reforms and revisions of the subjects' syllabi, as a student, a student-teacher, a teacher and finally a university lecturer. This exercise enabled me to re-live many experience in my memory, and to interpret them in the light of my present position as a curriculum historian and researcher in the field of domestic subjects. I wrote down an autobiographical timeline in order to help me remember significant moments in my student and professional life, which proved very useful as it helped me engage with my participants when I was conducting the interviews and during my observations. This autoethnographic approach allowed me to reflect on the particular issues that were raised by my participants, and to take account of my insider experience in the analytical process. As Chang (2008) observed, when conducting and analysing life-narratives, it is natural to compare and contrast one's experience with that of others.

#### Issues of insider research relevant to the study

Researchers raise a number of complex issues that may be encountered when conducting insider research (see among others Merton, 1972; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Bennet, 2003; Hodkinson, 2005; Gunasekara, 2007; Taylor, 2011). Such issues, which will be discussed below, include the fluidity of the insider/outsider status of the researcher, discussed by Naples (1996) and Acker (2001), the 'intimate familiarity' with the participants (Hockey, 1993, p. 201), making the familiar strange (DeLyser, 2001; Edwards, 2002; Labaree, 2002; Bennett, 2003), bias and subjectivity issues due to personal values and the pre-existing knowledge of the community (Smyth and Holian, 2008), and ethical principles of the research (Pring, 2001; Portelli, 2008). These issues have proved to be particularly relevant to my study, as I attempted to corroborate the narratives of my participants with my experience as an insider.

At times, the researcher may be an insider in certain situations which are familiar and be an outsider in other circumstances which are new or unknown to him/her. This complex issue of being an insider and outsider within the same study depends on the 'story' of the researcher, his or her background, and the context being investigated. I have experienced this tension between being an insider and outsider in the study, especially in particular instances when the interviewees were describing situations which I never experienced during my career. Here, I felt more of an outsider than an insider. This was due to the fact that the events discussed happened before my generation or when I was still a pupil at primary school.

The 'a priori' knowledge of the researcher is an essential element for the rapport between the researcher and the participants of a study (Aquilar, 1981). The latter may feel they do not need to conceal information from the researcher, since he/she has been experiencing similar situation/s or is already aware of the circumstances (Burgess, 1985; Hockey, 1993). The researcher gives great value to this building of trust between the two, as he/she can appreciate better the details of the research context under study. In my study, the relationship between the participant and I seemed to have improved during the interviews. A number of them were so enthusiastic about my research that they called me home to elaborate on things they thought that they had failed to clarify or to include in our conversation. Some others, on their own initiative, handed me material which they thought were important for my research and contacted people for me who thought that they could help me with my research. In one particular instance, my participant was so excited about my study that she maintained regular contact with me to discuss the progress of my research on a particular historical aspect, in which she played a key role during her working career.

The challenge of making the familiar strange and unpacking the obvious is a daunting task. Scholars conducting insider research identified various strategies to tackle this issue (Burgess, 1984; Galton and Delamont, 1985; Bennett, 2003; Taylor, 2011). Some of the ways this difficulty can be overcome are by asking questions about the setting and annotating all observations made in detail. These can be later '[...] regularly reviewed and cross referenced to other activities and events that have been observed so that the themes can be developed [...]' (Burgess, 1984, p. 28). Other strategies are to engage the researcher in formal training (Galton and Delamont, 1985), and to include a number of participants who share a different perspective about the area being researched (Sikes and Potts, 2008). I reflected upon the different strategies proposed by insider researchers and examined the ones that were relevant to this study. Finally, I applied what had been suggested by Burgess (1984) about the types of questions asked during the interviews and the idea proposed by Sikes and Potts (2008) about the selection of participants. These insights proved useful for my research, as it eased the problem of 'unlearning the familiar' in the various situations I encountered during data collection (Taylor, 2011, p. 16).

I also found that by utilising several methods of data collection during the research process and triangulating the findings, could address this potential problem of making the familiar strange successfully. For instance, as I was in the initial stages of analysing the data which emerged from the life history interviews, I also felt the need to conduct other less in-depth interviews with individuals who were involved during the particular moment in time when specific issues were significant. This was necessary because although I had quite a vast experience in the field, I wanted to ascertain other people's perceptions on some of the emerging issues.

Some researchers encounter situations where participants further aggravate the problem of over-familiarity with the research area. The latter may sense that the researcher already knows the answers to some of the questions asked during the interview (Louisy, 1997; Gunasekara, 2007). Sometimes, even asking the simplest question may prove challenging. 'You remember this', 'You are already aware of this' or 'As you already know' were phrases often used by my participants when they assumed that they did not need to delve more into familiar knowledge. They were considering the strange as familiar and assuming that I was already familiar with certain issues, which on some occasions was not the case. Therefore, I used DeLyser's technique (2001) of employing alternative ways of asking questions in order to focus on gathering information where the importance was not immediately obvious to my participants. I also felt the need to substantiate my findings through documentary and archival material to triangulate and elaborate further on specific issues or to provide evidence that otherwise was difficult to obtain from interviews.

Maintaining one's distance in the research in order to obtain a clear and unbiased approach is not only problematic but also complicated (Sikes and Potts, 2008). This was also evident in my study during the various life-history interviews that I conducted. Being objective and unbiased was often impossible, especially when the participants were good friends or knew my views due to formal or informal encounters. My professional commitments made it extremely difficult to keep my distance and take such an approach, as I am directly involved in teacher training courses and delivering subject-content modules, and I share my views during departmental meetings. Where it was possible to be objective during interviews, I did not encounter particular problems, although in some situations participants wanted to know my

views about certain issues we were discussing, as they knew that I was familiar with the topics under discussion. This was a rather challenging situation but I tried to deflect the attention from myself by asking other questions, in order to restore the roles as required.

Following strict ethical principles is crucial for the insider researcher. This is especially true when conducting research in a small community located on a small island, as was my case. It was therefore necessary to protect the interests of the participants and treat the responses given carefully by assuring confidentiality and anonymity. However, as Burgess (1985) and Portelli (2008) pointed out, concealing the identity of those involved in insider research is extremely difficult, especially when the community or institution under study is small and easily identifiable. In small communities, people tend to recognise each other or are quite easily identifiable by outsiders. Although careful considerations are taken to guarantee anonymity to participants, caution needs to be exercised when disseminating results. In their research, both Pring (2001) and Portelli (2008) omitted material that could reveal information about the participants from copies of the research findings that were published in their respective countries. In my study, I encountered only two participants who constantly reminded me not to write certain details that they disclosing. One of them was a key person in the field who felt uneasy about being identifiable by others. At times, I had to leave out important information provided by these participants or search for alternative sources, such as other participants or documentary evidence.

### **5.1.2 The research paradigm**

The principal aim of this study was to investigate the changes that occurred in the curricula of two school subjects, Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta over a span of fifty years, and to examine the role of key players involved in the process of curriculum change. It is a historical study focusing on individuals' life experiences in a social context. My choice of paradigm was influenced by the theories developed by Goodson on curriculum history, Goodson and Rudd's theory of refraction (2012) and Layton's model on the evolution of school subjects, as well as various international studies on curriculum history and life narratives inspired by them (see for instance, Goodson, 1983; Yung Chan, 2005; Mork, 2007; Briani, 2011).

The history of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Britain was traced by historians such as Yoxall (1965) and Sillitoe (1966), while other researchers in Britain and the US linked the subjects' history to gender and girls' education (Dyhouse, 1981; Purvis, 1985; Turnbull, 1987; Manthorpe, 1989; Stage and Vincenti, 1997; Apple, 2003; Elias, 2008). Attar (1990) employed a different approach in her controversial work. She wrote about the history and politics of Home Economic at a time when a curriculum transformation was underway in Britain during the 1980s. Attar, as a feminist and an outsider, conducted an ethnographic study in six schools where she observed lessons and interviewed pupils and teachers. In her qualitative research on the situation of the Home Economics curriculum in Australia, Pendergast (2001), a feminist Home Economics scholar, included a historical background by drawing upon an analysis of the literature in the field together with in-depth interviews with four Home Economics teachers. Her work as an insider provided some insights on the perception of the Home Economics profession and its pedagogy. More recently, Yung Chan (2005), also an insider, employed a socio-historical approach to investigate the curriculum history of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Hong Kong between 1950 and 2000. Although her work was mainly qualitative, she adopted a mixed method approach by using several data collection tools, including life history interviews, documentary research, questionnaires and informal field observations. After having reflected critically upon the approaches taken in the above-mentioned studies, I confirmed that the qualitative paradigm was best suited for my investigation.

The key characteristic of qualitative research is that the research is directly related to the situation under study. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative inquiry 'allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables' (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.12). The qualitative paradigm deals with assumptions about interpretation and human experiences, as opposed to quantitative designs, which tend to focus on quantifiable results and were therefore unsuitable for this research. In contrast to the quantitative approach,

[...] a qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives [...] or advocacy/participatory perspectives [...] or both. It also uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory

studies, or case studies. The researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data (Creswell, 2003, p.18).

The qualitative researcher is more concerned with understanding rather than with prediction of outcomes (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007). The researcher has to assume that ‘everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p. 5), seeking to understand the construction and meaning of social experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative researcher is concerned with the ‘abstract characteristics’ and ‘meanings given’ to events by the participants of the research (Kincholeo, 2003, p.188). The use of the qualitative paradigm is vital for a study that requires the lived experiences of individuals, as it focuses on understanding the meaning that these participants give to their life experiences (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

The adoption of the qualitative paradigm requires a sensitivity to the context (Kincholeo, 2003). The researcher has to be sensitive to the physical and social environment since it has an impact on the contribution of the participants to the study. In the present investigation, contextualisation is essential since the data is provided by individuals who have lived and experienced the changes that occurred in the teaching of Home Economics and Textiles Studies during their career. Their narrative will contribute directly to the research, therefore the study needs the qualitative researcher to ‘stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.10).

## **5.2 Data collection methods**

This research involves methods commonly applied to ethnography and autoethnographic studies, including observations, interviews and documentary analysis. The use of a multi-method approach was important to obtain a better insight on the curricula of Home Economics and Textiles Studies. Life history interviews together with archival research were necessary in order to corroborate the data provided by my participants. It was also necessary to include other methods, including semi-structured interviews, online focus groups, informal observations and analysis of

artefacts, in order to provide further insights on the socio-historical aspect of the study. This data triangulation provided an in-depth understanding of the issues under scrutiny.

### **5.2.1 Archival and document research**

Archival research was one of the data collecting methods required for this investigation, in order to access primary sources, including official and unofficial documents of the University of Malta, Ministries and Government Departments and the past and present Home Economics Association (HENTA/Home Economics in Action [HEiA]). I identified the various locations in Malta where these documents are kept, and I obtained permission to browse through them. The National Archives of Malta have a good-sized collection of government documents in the form of files, unpublished reports and official publications issued by the Ministry of Education and the Education Directorate, previously known as Department of Education. I also gained access to the Education Directorate's archives that house the Ministry and Department's circulars, and made use of the institutional archives of the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta. These include minutes of meetings of the Departments, Faculty, Council and Senate. I also accessed the *Malta Government Gazette* and Government official reports at the Melitensia section of the University library, as well as the documents held at the Faculty of Education's Nutrition, Family and Consumer Studies office. Digital archival material, however, is very limited. In fact, the documents that I referred to and analysed are all in paper form, and some of them are stored on open shelving and show evidence of physical degradation and deterioration. This phase of my investigation was very time consuming, as it required going through each individual file to select what was relevant for my research.

I only had restricted access to personal files and some other documents that were issued less than thirty years from the time I was conducting the research due to data protection. Although some of the information available in these files might have been important for my research, I had to accept that they are inaccessible. Missing documents were another important hurdle in data collection. However, the gaps in the primary data were compensated by analysing other documents, such as published government and ministry reports and annual reports published by various Government Departments/Ministries, personal documents handed over by some of the participants

involved in the study and other secondary sources, including books written about education in Malta. Additional artefacts were analysed, including newspaper articles, school logbooks, photographs, certificates, newsletters, schemes of work, lesson notes, samplers, old examination papers and reference books. During the data collection, I acquired a large collection of Home Economics and Textiles Studies textbooks and reference books that were used during the period under study. These Home Economics and Textiles Studies books proved valuable as several of my participants referred to their school textbooks during their life history interviews. Further attention was given to these books during the analysis process of this investigation.

The documents were carefully studied and analysed in order to gain clarity on the historical context related to Home Economics and Textiles. These documents were important in two ways. They provided a source of information from which a content analysis was made, and presented topics where the focus was on discourse analysis. These approaches to documentation analysis, especially the latter, focus ‘[...] on the ways in which any given document came to assume its actual content and structure’ (Prior, 2010, p.112). In my case, both content and discourse analysis of documents played a significant role when researching in government and ministry documents and files.

In Malta, archival documents directly relating to the development and the teaching of Home Economics and Textiles Studies are generally lacking. Generally, much of the documentary evidence found is unofficial and unpublished, and consists mostly of substantial material related to the teaching of domestic subjects prior to the 1960s that is freely accessible. Archival research provided a way of retrieving events and stories that could have otherwise been lost, buried in files and cabinets, away from public scrutiny.

Atkinson and Coffey (2004) rightly stated that ‘documentary sources are not surrogates for other kinds of data’ (p.58). In qualitative research, these documents may be used as the only source of information, but in my case, they complemented other methods that generated a substantial amount of data. Hence, this considerable amount of archival documents, together with personal accounts of the participants in the study, was necessary to construct a comprehensive historical account of the development of Home Economics and Textiles Studies as subjects in Maltese Secondary Schools.



### **5.2.2 Life history research as a mode of inquiry**

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships between the individual and the society at large, the life history interview was one of the modes of inquiry used for this investigation. Life history ‘facilitate[s] a deeper appreciation of an individual’s experience of the past, living with the present and a means of facilitating and challenging the future’ (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.186).

This type of interview is ideal in order to integrate issues related to teachers’ careers in a historical context related to education and schooling. Since the 1980s, the use of life history and narrative research in education has increased, following the general trend in the social sciences (Coffey and Delamont, 2000; Roberts, 2002; Chase, 2005), and many academics in the field of education have been using life histories as the main method of research in their studies (see for instance, Goodson, 1981, 1983; Sikes and Troyna, 1991; Knowles, 1992; Goodson, 1992c; Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996; Munro, 1998; Weiler and Middleton, 1999; Smith, 2011).

Goodson assumed a key role in promoting and employing life history and biographic approach to the studies of teachers’ lives in relation to school subjects (1981, 1983, 1992c). According to him (2008):

[t]he teacher’s life history provides the personal grounding for investigation and the development of historical understanding allows a broader discussion of political and theoretical contexts. [...] Life history and historical methods link the personal, the practical and the theoretical in new ways that operate at all three levels (pp. vii-viii).

In order to analyse the narratives of teachers and the socio-political context in which these are written, it is essential to have a ‘theory-building meeting ground’ (Goodson, 2008, p. vii). Goodson (1994) suggested that the ‘middle ground’ is the most appropriate location where to develop theory, as it is positioned in between the policies that structure the curriculum and the realities that take place within the classroom. A focus on the ‘middle ground’ can enable the researcher to investigate the lives of teachers who experienced both ends of the continuum (Goodson, 1994). Since my study involves integrating research on policy-making and subject teaching regarding Home Economics and Textiles Studies, this research method has been found particularly suitable in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the

dynamics emerging from the data.

### **Investigating the context of life history research**

One of the key factors in life history research is context (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Adriansen, 2012), since it allows the researcher to unravel the unique experiences of others (Cole and Knowles, 2001). The life stories of individuals cannot be studied in isolation as they inevitably fail to portray a true image of the situations. However, when these stories or lives are placed within the historical and social context, as is the case of this research, they can illuminate central issues that otherwise would not be visible if the lives were studied in isolation. Therefore, the context serves as a backdrop for the analysis of the life history narratives. Goodson and Sikes (2001) pointed out that life histories '[...] without contextual commentary on issues of time and space, [life stories] remain uncoupled from the conditions of their social construction' (p. 17). The context is a 'reference point, an essential backdrop' which aids the researcher to acquire a profound understanding of the participants' lives and experiences' (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 79). The context in my research is highly instrumental as it localized the stories told by the participants. The fifty year period under study was characterized by turbulent times, especially in the political, economic and social spheres, and are reflected in many of the narratives collected, since politics are an important element in Maltese social life. Some of this study's participants gave me a snapshot of what they experienced and I had to extend my research in order to acquire a complete picture of the educational, social and political context in which the stories occurred.

### **Life history interviews**

During life history interviews, the participants are not merely expected to respond to cues put forward by the researcher or interviewer, but are expected to play a leading role in the conversation (Plummer, 1983). In this research, both retrospective and contemporaneous life histories were used. In the retrospective type, the past is reconstructed by the feelings and interpretations that the individual is experiencing at that moment. On the other hand, contemporaneous life history describes the recent past or present events as they occur (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). A combination of both types of life history was necessary for my research study as the participants were selected according to their experience in the area of study.

### **The selection of the participants**

Life history researchers suggest a number of sampling techniques that may be used for life history research. These include purposive, convenience, opportunistic, snowball and homogenous techniques (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Samuel, 2009). Several of these sampling techniques were considered for this qualitative research, and purposive sampling was found to be the most appropriate technique for the collection of life-history narratives. Denscombe (2007) argued that this type of sampling method is required in studies where participants ‘[...] are selected with a specific purpose in mind, and that purpose reflects the particular qualities of the people [...] chosen and their relevance to the topic of the investigation (p. 17)’, confirming the view expressed by Goodson and Sikes (2001) that purposive sampling is particularly useful when the research focuses on the lives of individuals who have good knowledge and experience. It was used to recruit the participants of the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussions, according to their knowledge and experience within the Home Economics and Textiles Studies community. I conducted fourteen life history interviews with individuals experienced in teacher training, teaching and/or administration was an important selection criterion for the study. Some participants are retired government employees who had very influential roles in the development of the subjects between 1960 and 2010 (see Participants’ Profile of Life History Interviews in Appendix 2). The participants’ career profiles provide an indication of the positions held and their years of experience in the Home Economics and Textiles Studies community. The details about the positions they held during their careers were not clearly specified in order to protect their identity. The position of administrator includes the role of Head of Department of one of the subjects in secondary schools, Head of School and also executive positions within the Education Directorate. The lecturing position includes lecturing at the Mater Admirabilis Training College during the 1960s and 1970s and at the University of Malta.

I personally recruited the participants involved in my research and there were instances where some participants, among them a couple of key informants, acquired contact details of other prospective participants for me. Snowball sampling proved very effective in reaching participants who were directly involved in specific periods under study. This type of sampling is an effective technique ‘for building up a reasonable-sized sample, especially when used as part of a small-scale research project’

(Denscombe, 2007, p. 17-18). I concur with Descombe's view that this technique is compatible with purposive sampling, as in my case, the participants who suggested others were fully aware that those who could be approached for this research had to possess certain criteria; most importantly they had to form part of the Home Economics and Textiles Studies community during the period between 1960 and 2010. I invited most participants to take part through emails or telephone and others were asked face-to face when met at their place of work, usually in schools. All the participants of the life history interviews were females as it is only during the past two of decades that male students have been given the opportunity to study Home Economics at secondary school.

### **The procedure**

During the life history interviews, the participants relied on their memory and I had to assume that the stories they described and interpreted were true, as they understood and remembered them. As Middleton (1993) argued, 'it was possible for a woman to have been wrong in her interpretation of past events' (p. 68). The essential factor is not just the stories as they are told but the interpretation and analysis of these stories (Middleton 1993), along with their validation by means of additional sources.

Initially I planned a set of semi-structured questions to guide me through the interviews (see the Pilot Interview Guide in Appendix 4). Two pilot life history interviews were conducted for the purpose of my study. There were a number of reasons for taking this procedure, namely, to check the clarity of the prepared semi-structured questions and to eliminate or modify those that were ambiguous, to check the approximate duration of the interview and to test my interviewing skills so as to build confidence in my role as an interviewee. The first pilot I conducted was with a very experienced Textiles Studies teacher, however, it required several sessions as most of the time she deviated from the topics we were discussing and focused more on her private life rather than her career as a teacher. Another pilot was conducted with a less experienced Home Economics teacher. The session was short as the story she told was different from that of the other teacher involved in the pilot testing. This provided a clear indication that I needed to recruit participants who were very experienced and if possible had been already teaching during the first few decades of the period being studied, that is, between the 1960s and the 1980s.

### **Launching the life history interviews**

After conducting the pilot interviews, I modified the interview guide and included unstructured type of questions (see Interview Guide in Appendix 5). These, together with some prompts, were necessary to facilitate the flow of the conversation during the interview. I prepared the questions in Maltese and English, to give participants the choice of language to use during the interview. Only two of the interviews were conducted solely in English.

When recruiting the participants, I described to them the nature and scope of the study, and explained what the interviews would entail. They were given an information sheet including my contact details, in case they wished to inquire more about the research (see section 5.4).

When the participants agreed to take part in the research, they were given two copies of the consent form for them to read and sign (see section 5.4). I took a copy and they kept one for their own reference. All but three of the persons contacted accepted the invitation to participate. One was an old friend and colleague who had family commitments which prevented her from having sufficient time to participate in the research. The other two were elderly persons who first accepted to be interviewed but eventually refused.

The consent form included details about confidentiality and anonymity as I wanted to protect the identity of the participants. At the time of data collection during 2010, there were approximately one hundred Home Economics and Textiles Studies teachers in Maltese secondary and post-secondary schools. Thus, when I approached prospective participants, I explained to them that full confidentiality was going to be kept throughout the investigation and pseudonyms would be used to protect their anonymity. Most participants did not express concern about how they might be identifiable by others within the community. Those who were initially concerned were the ones who held conspicuous positions in the field. However, once I explained to them that I would keep their identity concealed, be extremely careful not to present particular details, eliminate any information which could reveal their identity, and provide them with the transcription of their respective interviews before including them in my work, they agreed wholeheartedly to participate in the research.

Amongst the participants, two key informants were extremely helpful in paving the way for more important interviews and in discussing significant issues about the situation of the subjects during the fifty year period under investigation. One was also willing to part with some documents which she had tucked away in her box room. These were extremely useful for a further analysis of the context and activities that took place during her time as an employee of the Department of Education.

I conducted fourteen one-to-one life history interviews. Some interviews were quite informal and were more a 'conversation-type encounter' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p. 28). Although these sessions were planned to last about one hour and a half, most of them took much longer. Several interviewing sessions were required, not only to cover the whole aspect of the participants' stories, but also to clarify issues that I encountered while transcribing the interview of the previous encounters. Most encounters included informal conversations. These were extremely valuable in establishing a rapport with the participants especially during the initial interviews, and to clarify or summarise what had been discussed in previous sessions. Moreover, the cultivation of trust in the relationship between the researcher and the participant enables the work to progress smoothly (Measor and Sikes, 1992).

I was very aware of the importance of presenting myself in the most appropriate way for the life history interviews, as this leaves a profound impression on the participants and has an impact on the data collected. The interviewer's self-disclosure is a highly debated issue as some argue that this helps to 'encourage respondents to be more forthcoming' (Reinharz and Chase, 2003, p. 79; see also Oakley, 1981), while others believe that the respondents should be the focus of the interview rather than the interviewer (Weiss, 1994). I had to decide whether to share my life story with the participants or keep my distance. I acknowledged my status as an insider early on in the study, and my main concern was to build trust with my participants and to show empathy by sharing my experiences. Smith (2012) provided a similar experience in her work when conducting life history interviews with teachers: 'Frequently, I found that I identified so closely with the women that sharing my experiences felt like the natural thing to do, although I made a conscious effort to curb this' (p. 5). Smith's experience corresponds closely to mine as I often felt it was necessary to share my story with the participants.

### **Recording the interviews**

A digital recorder proved very useful during the interviews as I could capture every detail of the participants' stories. I transcribed the interviews between sessions and I handed the transcripts to the participants to read. Respondent validation, as remarked by Scott and Morrison (2006), was important as it helped to build trust between myself, as a researcher, and the participant, and it was a way of reducing bias. This also enabled me to obtain valuable feedback regarding the accuracy of the data obtained from the interview. Some participants amended small sections of their interviews, usually short excerpts where they had mentioned names of colleagues whose confidentiality they wanted to protect. Others clarified particular issues by writing additional comments to provide more detail or subsequently remembered experiences that they wanted to share. At this point, I could use the data as was necessary for the study.

### **5.2.3 The semi-structured interviews**

While conducting the first analysis of the life history interviews, I carried out supplementary shorter one-to-one semi-structures interviews with several individuals, formerly or presently involved in Home Economics, Textiles Studies or D&T. It was necessary to corroborate the information gathered from archival research with that from the life history interviews. I used purposive sampling to obtain clarifications, further details or to acquire varied perceptions and experiences about specific situations related to the teaching of the subjects. The participants selected for these shorter interviews were males and females. Some had limited teaching experience in Home Economics and Textiles Studies. However, others had a vast experience in a particular field or were directly involved in events occurred during a particular historical phase under study. I contacted the less experienced teachers by email as they were mostly past undergraduate students who I personally knew or whose contact details I managed to obtain through colleagues. Some others were referred to me by my key informants and participants of the life history interviews. I interviewed nineteen individuals, sixteen from Malta and three from Gozo (see Participants' Profile of the Semi-structures Interviews in Appendix 8).

I followed the same procedures and strategies I used for the life history interviews, providing the interviewees with an information sheet and a consent form, adhering to

all the ethical requirements related to my research (see section 5.4). Most interviews did not last more than an hour, and I mostly used open-ended questions which helped the participants focus on particular themes or periods in their career. The aim was to obtain an interpretation of particular issues rather than gathering more data. The types of questions were designed according to the individuals' experience in teaching the subject or related to a particular aspect of their teaching career. I made use of a digital recorder during the interviews and I transcribed all interviews which after a few days were also handed back to my participants for respondent validation.

#### **5.2.4 Online focus groups**

The next methodological tool used to complete the collection of the necessary data for my research was the focus group. Focus groups as part of qualitative research have been well-established for many years (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

I had planned to use the more traditional face-to-face focus group set-up, in order to capture the opinions and perceptions of two groups of young teachers on several issues regarding the teaching of the subjects in Malta. The aims were to achieve 'depth of understanding' rather than generalising from the data collected from these focus group discussions (Stewart and Williams, 2005, p. 398), and to explore the interactions between the participants, which generate a deeper understanding of their views and experiences (Rodham and Gavin, 2006). However I encountered logistical problems when I was in the initial process of organising the groups. My participants were all young teachers who had to juggle family commitments with a full-time job. They lived in different parts of the island so it was quite difficult for them to meet all together at a specific time and date. It was also difficult for them to come to my workplace or to another central location where I could conduct the focus group. Finally I found a solution which suited all my participants – the online focus group (OFG).

The traditional focus group has been enhanced by the use of Internet which facilitates communication by eliminating the distance barrier at a much lesser cost with respect to telephone and fax, thus facilitating the administration of the focus group discussion. Various articles have been written on the use of Internet when applied to focus groups, and virtual or online focus groups (OFGs) are gaining popularity in academic research. The use of technology applied to focus groups has been mostly applied in the health sciences and marketing (Murray, 1997; Adler and Zarchin, 2001; O'Connor and



Madge, 2003; Kenny, 2005; Tates, et al., 2009) and is also recently gaining ground in social science research (Gaiser, 1997; Chase and Alvarez, 2000; Stewart and Williams, 2005).

There were some clear-cut advantages when using OFGs with respect to the more traditional face-to-face focus groups. Travelling costs were non-existent and the participants contributed to the focus group from the comfort of their home. Also, the sense of anonymity encouraged freedom of expression, in that they felt secure that their identity was concealed and they could express their honest opinions. The practical difficulties of data recording and transcribing were less of an issue than with other data collection methods, such as interviewing. The transcript was created while the OFG discussion progressed. Multi-threaded discussions were produced and the analysis of the data created by the OFG became quicker and easier to conduct. In my case, my participants were all computer literate and had Internet access, both at their place of work and also at home. Some posted comments online during the day, when they had some free time at work, while others intervened late at night. The participants had the advantage that they could read and reflect on other participants' comments before replying. This created discussions which were rich and very informative.

I envisaged several challenging situations, as this was my first experience of conducting OFGs and also of being a moderator. The review of literature focusing on OFG enabled me to grasp the necessary skills to succeed in my task.

### **Types of online focus groups – methodological options**

The most suitable type of OFG for my research was the asynchronous one, as the participants were flexible to engage in the discussion when they had time available. The synchronous type of focus group was inappropriate as it required the participants to be all available during a specific period of the day and this would have created problems due to their other commitments.

I considered the use of Moodle, a virtual learning environment (VLE) application used by educators to conduct online courses. However, on enquiring further about the use of this educational software for my OFGs, the University authorities informed me that in order to be allowed access, my participants had to be University students or staff,

as they required a password and a user name. Consequently I had to exclude Moodle from my options.

Facebook may also be a useful tool for online focus groups and a Facebook group may prove valuable for research purposes. In the case of my study, a Facebook group was not a suitable option for me as at the time, some of my participants were not yet well versed in the use of social networking sites.

Fairly recently, another option that has been used by researchers in this area of online communication is the 3D graphical environment which allows for both text and graphical representations (Steward and Williams, 2005). In these visual graphical environments, also known as Multi-User Dungeons or Domains (MUDs) and object oriented MUDs (MOOs), the participants of the focus groups are represented as avatars. They are able to choose their own visual representation from a list of options and then use text to communicate with the others. Participants may also use emoticons to express feelings during the whole process (Steward and Williams, 2005). This setting is similar to that found in online games where virtual worlds are created and synchronous participation takes place. I did not consider this mode of creating OFGs as specialised IT skills and support are required and the participants need to communicate in real time.

I also considered the use of other software, but choosing a free and user-friendly application proved rather difficult. Therefore, I opted for Google Groups which can be used for discussion groups and above all is easy to use, free and reliable. The method for conducting the OFGs had to be easy and simple, since although the participants were computer literate, the time available for participation in the OFG was limited. They could not spend time learning how to use particular applications or software from scratch. The time factor was a very crucial issue for my participants and I had to facilitate the set-up of my OFG as much as possible.

### **The focus group participants**

The sample of participants for my focus groups was a purposive one, as it is the most appropriate method for the selection of participants according to specific criteria (Denscombe, 2007). The group of participants included mid-career Home Economics or Textiles Studies teachers with ten to fifteen years of experience. I already knew

them personally and I had their contact details, including email addresses. All the participants of these focus groups were females due to the reasons I mentioned earlier about the male Home Economics teachers. The Home Economics focus group had six participants, while the Textiles Studies group had three. At the time the total number of Home Economics teachers in Malta was about ninety and those who taught Textiles Studies was ten.<sup>23</sup> Krueger and Casey (2009) argued that the ideal size of a focus group is between five to eight participants, as the larger the group, the more complex the focus group becomes to control. When conducting focus groups, the researcher cannot generalise from the outcomes, but can understand and obtain insights on the issues being discussed (Krueger and Casey, 2009). Therefore, the rationale behind the choice and the number of participants for the focus groups was crucial.

I made initial contact with each participant by email and gave them instructions on how to log on through our Google Groups, which were called HEfocus Group and TSfocus Group. As the names indicate, the first was used with the participants who are Home Economics teachers while the latter catered for the Textiles Studies teachers. I also advised them to create an email address that did not identify their real identity in order to keep the members of the focus group anonymous. I was aware of the repercussions that could result in case of a breach of anonymity by the members of a focus group. Some of them also used an online pseudonym to protect their identity further. Others did not mind being identified, and preferred to use their real names.

All participants were bilingual, and they speak both Maltese and English. Very often, Maltese people tend to speak in their mother language but write in English. I informed the participants that they could write in either language and to disregard any problems related to grammar and syntax, as I wanted them to feel at ease during the discussions. I hoped that they could concentrate more on the issues being discussed rather than being conscious of their grammatical mistakes. Certain individuals have different abilities in verbal communication and their typing skills (McGrath, 1984 cited in Fern, 2001). Some may be capable of formulating 'more thought[s] orally than they can by typing them' (Fern, 2001, p. 70).

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<sup>23</sup> The number of practitioners in the field of Home Economics and Textiles Studies is relatively small when compared to those of other school subjects, also bearing in mind the size and population of the Maltese Islands.

Confidentiality issues regarding online methods of data collection are similar to those concerning more traditional research methods (see Rodham and Gavin, 2006). In fact, confidentiality was a very important ethical issue for my OFG. As I did when utilising the other methodological tools, I adhered to all the ethical requirements to elicit the necessary data (see section 5.3). In this case, breach of confidentiality was one of the problems I encountered during my OFG discussions, when one participant leaked some sensitive information that was being discussed. Fortunately, I was informed of this by a third person, who was unaware of the focus group. I was already aware that this ethical problem could arise, so I took immediate measures to rectify the situation. I had to remind the participants about confidentiality by writing personal emails to each one, stating that what was being discussed during the OFG was to remain within the group. I kept scrutiny on the OFG proceedings to make sure that such an incident did not repeat itself.

### **The HEfocus and TSfocus Groups - The challenges encountered**

The process of creating two Google accounts and setting up the HEfocus and TSfocus groups was easy to carry out. I wanted only the selected participants to join in the discussion so membership was strictly by invitation. Some of the participants encountered minor teething problems which I sorted out immediately for them. I posted an introduction to the two focus groups, followed by a particular theme approximately every ten days (see Themes of the HEfocus and TSfocus groups in Appendix 9). At first the participants of the HEfocus group posted regularly and discussions were intense. In fact one participant informed me that the postings were rather lengthy and sometimes difficult to follow and answer. The reading load is not the same for everyone; so as a moderator of the OFG, I sent a gentle reminder to each participant to number their arguments for easy reference and to write briefer messages. This was gladly accepted and done in later discussions. The OFG lasted for five weeks during which the participants posted thirty-two replies to three topics, which were the state school syllabus, the general perception about status, and resource allocation and collegiality. At the end of each topic, I wrote some general observations to provoke further discussion on some aspects which were raised by the participants.

The TSfocus group presented further issues. I had to alert the participants to visit the site and to give their contribution. The creation of such a small focus group proved

problematic as although the participants had various experiences, encouraging discussion was difficult and fairly limited interaction took place. However, they managed to come up with issues other than those which were planned. This focus group lasted approximately five weeks and I used the same procedure as for the HEfocus group.

Apart from the issues discussed above, other factors such as the timescale, the non-verbal cues, the group dynamics and the moderating process had to be taken into account when considering the use of OFGs. Group dynamics and OFG moderation were the most challenging issues I encountered. Group dynamics are difficult to build online especially if the participants of a focus group know each other. In my case, although some participants could identify each other since they used their real names, the rapport among the members was good. This created an environment where participants were at ease and could post comments which were genuine. This was evident from the level of the discussion and the type of input given by the participants and also from the fact that nobody withdrew from the groups. However, as often happens in more traditional focus groups, the presence of the dominant participant tries to take prominence in the discussion. When the dominant participant of one of my OFGs started commenting on certain topics and wrote at considerable length, another participant contacted me via email to express her irritation. While admitting that the dominant participant was very knowledgeable, she remarked that it would have been better for that participant to refrain from overloading her postings.

Moderating virtual focus groups is a more challenging task than moderating the traditional face-to face ones (Gaiser, 2008). For instance, the moderator needs to keep the discussion alive by using probes to elicit interaction, and keep the focus on the given topic when the discussion strays outside the area being investigated (Gaiser 1997). In my OFGs, when the discussion about a topic was losing steam or required the moderator's input, I used recapitulation to summarise the most important points already discussed, thus eliciting further response. When planning for the OFGs, I also considered the possibility of having an external moderator to ensure a more neutral approach and avoid conditioning the participants in any way. However, I decided otherwise as it would have been impossible to find a suitable candidate in Malta who was familiar with the issues being discussed and also an outsider. Moreover, the

inclusion of such a figure could have jeopardised confidentiality and anonymity. I acknowledge that the outcome of my OFGs could have been different, but I decided to assume the role of the moderator myself as is common practice with most qualitative researchers (Liamputtong, 2011).

### **5.2.5 Non-participant observations**

Another data collection technique that proved useful for this study was non-participant observation, which is considered an unobtrusive method of collecting primary data (Williams, 2008). This technique offers possibilities that other methodological tools cannot provide (Liu and Maitlis, 2010). During my work as a teacher trainer, I conduct visits to schools to examine undergraduate NFCS students during their teaching practicum. In 2010, I visited ten boys' and girls' secondary schools to investigate the common pedagogical practices used by the teachers of the subjects under study. I also had the opportunity to observe the conditions of the Home Economics and Textiles Studies laboratories in these schools. I also gathered additional information from subject teachers and student teachers through informal conversations. The detailed field notes taken to record my observations and the information gained during these visits were later analysed and categorized according to the emerging themes. Subsequently, I used them to corroborate information obtained through other methods of data collection. This type of data collection technique involves ethical concerns, as greater importance is given to the voice of the researcher than to the participants during the observations and when writing the study (Liu and Maitlis, 2008). My observations were not focused on individuals but rather on the research setting and on informal conversations. However, I still maintained anonymity and confidentiality by not naming the places I observed and the people I engaged with during my visits.

### **5.3 Data organisation and analysis**

In order to organise my data in such a way as to facilitate its analysis, I devised an indexing system to cater for all the data collected, including the archival documents, life history and semi-structured interviews, focus groups and observations. I analysed each type of data in order to identify emerging links, patterns and themes, which I highlighted according to a colour coding system for easier retrieval. The same colour coding was used for all types of data sources. After having analysed all the data, I collected all the information according to its colour coding and identified the issues

emerging from the data. Referring back to the international literature, I established the themes that constitute my analysis chapters.

### **5.3.1 The archival documents**

In the first phase of my data collection, I focused on archival documents. I photocopied all relevant information and took note of additional information while I was conducting the archival research, taking detailed references of all the relevant documents. During this process, I catalogued the documents according to their different types. For instance, Department of Education and Ministry of Education files, were subcategorised as memos, minutes and circulars. At the end of the data collection, I briefly analysed the information contained in the documents, in order to categorise and index the data according to various topics, such as Education in Malta, Teacher Training, Examinations, the Housecraft Schools, Grammar Schools and Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary Technical School, Extended Courses, Housecraft Courses in Primary Schools and Housecraft/Home Economics and Needlework teaching in Primary/Secondary Schools. When all documents were organised, I analysed their content and took notes of any important information that I deemed interesting for my study. These notes included quotes taken from the documents to illustrate the various issues. These were duly referenced and kept readily available in a specific Word document file. These quotes were very useful especially in the illustration of the historical framework of the study and in the process of triangulation with information obtained through other data collection methods.

### **5.3.2 The life history narratives**

The second phase of my data collection focused on life history narratives. Life historians argue that the analysis of the life history narratives begins as soon as the researcher embarks on the first interviewing session (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). I started taking note of the themes while I was conducting each interview/conversation with my participants. In this way, I could reflect on these themes between interviewing sessions. After having transcribed each interview, I listened to them various times until I felt I had obtained a deep enough understanding of the narrative and made sense of the data. I started to construct a framework based on the different themes that were appearing in the information that I was obtaining from the narratives of my participants. I came to regard this type of framework as the most suitable for this study,

since the themes emerging from the data tallied with those found in the international literature (see Chapter 3) and in the archival documents. The transcripts were colour coded according to themes for easy reference. Subsequently, relevant excerpts were grouped according to their colour code, duly referenced, and copied into different Word document files according to the theme to which they referred.

### **5.3.3 The semi-structured interviews**

The semi-structured interviews were organised and analysed in a similar way to the life histories. Although the semi-structured interviews were shorter than the life history interviews, they offered clarification and provided further insights concerning specific themes, issues and events that were either mentioned in passing, or omitted by the participants of the life history interviews. The themes highlighted in the semi-structured interviews were broadly similar to those of the life history interviews, and were colour coded, grouped and analysed accordingly.

### **5.3.4 The online focus group discussions**

Unlike traditional focus groups, online focus groups have the advantage that the transcript or text file is created instantly while the OFG is in progress. Hence, since a threaded discussion was created as soon as the participants gave their contribution, there was no need to transcribe the sessions. I saved and stored these text files for immediate retrieval on different devices to insure no data loss. The themes identified in the previous stages of the research were used to initiate the OFG discussions and generally, the participants kept to the topics indicated. The general themes included state school syllabus, subject status and subject options, and were similar for both the Home Economics and the Textiles Studies OFGs. During the exercise, I read through the threaded discussions and tried to make sense of the data. As suggested by Kitzinger (2005), I re-read the discussions multiple times to ensure that I did not miss any minor comment made by the participants. While analysing the discussions, I immediately noticed that the participants initially focused on the theme that was introduced, and then moved on to other similar issues that were raised during the various inputs of other members. I organised the data by taking note of these recurring issues raised by the participants and colour coded them according to the different themes.



### **5.3.5 Non-participant observations**

Before carrying out non-participant observations, I planned how to write and record each observation in order to facilitate the analysis process (see Williams, 2008). I followed Spradley's (1980) three stage funnel, which consists of descriptive, focused and selective observations. These stages helped me in my subsequent analysis of the data. During the observation process, I engaged with the data by reading thoroughly each set of field notes. These were systematically organised and later categorised according to the emerging themes, which comprised resources, the general conditions of the Home Economics and Textiles Studies laboratories, option choices, and students' abilities. The notes were colour coded and supplemented with further comments, before being extracted and sorted in different Word document files according to their different themes.

On completion of the above-mentioned data collection phases, I was in a position to proceed to the triangulation of the data. It was only after I verified all the information gathered through the different data collection methods that I could proceed to the next stage of my study, namely the in-depth reflection leading to the critical analysis presented in the following chapters.

## **5.4 Ethical Considerations**

As an insider researcher, I was aware of the ethical sensitivity of my research, especially as the methodological tools that were chosen required direct contact with individuals. I submitted a University Ethical Approval application that was approved at the Thesis Outline meeting, in the presence of my supervisors.<sup>24</sup> Ethical clearance was required before conducting the interviews and the focus group discussions, and key ethical issues had to be addressed before I could embark on the data collection process. Firstly, the participants were required to understand the nature of the study before actually deciding to take part in this investigation. Secondly, as a researcher, I had to take care not to cause any type of stress or discomfort to the participants. Finally, I was obliged to protect the interests of my participants and treat the responses given carefully, by assuring confidentiality and anonymity.

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<sup>24</sup> The meeting took place on 17th March 2010 (see Appendix 3).

Since informed consent was crucial for the success of this research, an information sheet and a consent form were prepared before recruiting the prospective participants. The participants were invited to take part in the research, as previously mentioned, and were given an information sheet that provided details describing the nature and the scope of the study (see Appendix 6). This information sheet gave further details about the interview, what it would entail, namely a meeting for an hour or so at a place convenient for the participants, and that digital recording of the interviewing sessions was to be carried out. Once they agreed to take part in the project, the participants were free to make contact with me. On acceptance, they were given a consent form that they were required to read and sign (see Appendix 7).<sup>25</sup> If participants wished to withdraw, they had the freedom to back out without the need to provide an explanation without any further communications about the research. In this case, no further communication would have been made about the research. However, nobody backed out during the research. Those who agreed to participate were given the freedom to choose where the interview was to take place. Ideally, the venue would have been the participant's own home, where the conversation could not be overheard. However where this was not possible, as the researcher, it was up to me to find an appropriate location where the interview session could be carried out successfully and confidentially. I always informed the participants on the venue beforehand, in order to get their approval and ensure they were fully satisfied with the conditions in which their interview was to take place.

Before conducting the interviews, I explained to the participants that full confidentiality would be kept throughout this investigation, and pseudonyms would be used to protect their anonymity. The interviews conducted were to be recorded with the participants' consent. The participants were made fully aware that if they felt that they should decline to answer any of the questions during the interview, they were entitled to do so. This also applied in case the participants felt that the digital recorder had to be switched off for part or parts of the interview session, whenever they felt that part/s of the information given should not be included. Respondent validation is important in order to obtain valuable feedback regarding the accuracy of the data obtained from the interview, hence recorded interviews were transcribed and handed

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<sup>25</sup> The information sheet and consent form were translated into Maltese for those participants who felt more confident in reading in their native language.

to the respondents for their approval. At this stage, the role of the participants was to confirm that the information given during the interview could be used for the study, and that the data they provided was an accurate account of their beliefs and attitudes (see Scott and Morrison, 2006). When the participants felt that some excerpts from the interview were to be omitted in order to protect their interests, I was obliged to refrain from using them in the study.

As mentioned above, the data collected during the interviews, with the participants' consent, was recorded using a digital recorder. I was aware that in certain situations, participants could feel uncomfortable at the thought that their words were being recorded, so I endeavoured to show the interviewees that I had no problem with them going off the record. The participants were asked to choose their preferred language for the interview, since they could be more at ease using one language rather than another. When the participants preferred the interviews to be carried out in Maltese, I translated the transcript into English for the purpose of the thesis. All electronic data was stored in secure, password-protected storage systems, including an external hard drive, a USB stick and a CD. The USBs and any written data about the participants were safely locked in a home safe.

The same ethical measures were taken when recruiting the participants of the focus group discussions, placing particular emphasis on issues of consent and anonymity. Confidentiality is an important issue when conducting online focus groups (Rodham and Gavin, 2006). The participants were given an information sheet explaining the aims, purpose and nature of the study was sent to the online focus groups participants, in order for me to obtain informed consent, ensure that the participants were aware of the aims of the research and were aware of what the findings were going to be used for. I made clear to them that they could withdraw from the research at any time, that the multi-threaded discussions of the focus group would be kept safe and that the data would be analysed for the purpose of the study. Given their written nature, OFG discussions may be more subject to breaches of confidentiality, as comments may be copied outside the group. In my case, the participants were duly informed that what was going to be discussed in the OFGs needed to remain confidential. A confidential agreement was sent to each member, informing them that they had to observe strict

confidentiality, so that each participant could feel free to share her opinion on the topics that were to be discussed.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Being an insider shaped the way I organised my work. As Goodson (1995) observed, beginning research from the collection of life history interviews focuses the work on the lives of practitioners. In order to obtain further insights on these experiences, I conducted archival research to verify some of the historical events mentioned by the participants and their factual recall. Consequently, I used multiple methods to shape this investigation. After having organised the data collected, in the light of the extant international literature, I identified a series of issues that will be discussed in the following chapters. The documentary evidence is combined with the narratives of the participants and the researcher's own reminiscences as an insider, in order to illustrate the various issues that bore an influence on the development of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta along the years.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **PATTERNS OF STATUS AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter illustrates the evolution of the status of Home Economics and Textiles Studies as school subjects. It focuses on the various attempts made by the subjects' community to attain academic status for Home Economics and Textiles Studies by developing a scientific body of knowledge and emphasising the benefits attained through the practical and vocational aspect of the subjects. It also dwells on the link between status and resource allocation through a discussion of the problematic issues arising from the practical nature of the subjects, as well as issues related to the priority given to Home Economics and Textiles Studies according to the socio-economic policies of the Maltese government.

#### **6.1 The struggle for status**

In the past, the societal perception of the role of women was that a woman's domain was the home, and that her competence was limited to housekeeping and the well-being of the family. For many decades, domestic subjects provided practical skills for women to manage their households efficiently, so their status reflected the low social status of women, the subjects' end users. Moreover, ever since their establishment in schools, both Home Economics and Textiles Studies included a practical component as a substantial part of their syllabi. Consequently, the secondary importance long associated with practical subjects contributed to their low status with respect to the mainstream academic subjects.

The struggles that Home Economics and Textiles Studies had to face in Malta in order to obtain recognition as school subjects may be categorised according to the three traditions mentioned by Goodson (1993). Academic subjects have a strong tradition leading to examinable knowledge while the non-academic, low-status and 'practical or vocational' subjects are seen to be more directed towards 'non-professional vocations' (Goodson 1993, p.29). Thus, practical subjects tend to be classified as having both a pedagogical and an utilitarian dimension, as they apply mostly child-centred methodologies. These types of pedagogies focus on training students to be 'active agents' rather than just 'passive recipients' of knowledge (Goodson, 1993, p.

30). Students who are more practically inclined tend to be less academically able and less successful within a traditional educational system that promotes academic achievement. Consequently, practical subjects, such as the subjects under study, often obtain a low status ranking in the school curriculum. Historically, Home Economics and Textiles Studies subjects in Malta were mostly popular with students who were more practically inclined. The emphasis given to the practical slant of the subjects inevitably reduced time allocated to the subjects' theoretical knowledge.

Since their introduction in Maltese schools, Home Economics and Textiles Studies underwent various changes in status. These were mostly influenced by the perceptions or ideologies of (i) various administrators at the Education Department, (ii) the Home Economics and Textiles Studies teaching community, (iii) the students, and (iv) the parents.

## **6.2 The status of domestic subjects in the various educational institutions**

### **6.2.1 The Housecraft School**

The Housecraft schools established in Malta and Gozo played an important part in promoting domestic subjects and improving their status (see Chapter 3). Students attending the Housecraft School could put into practice the theoretical lessons in Cookery, Housewifery and Laundry Work that they had previously followed in their respective schools. The Housecraft School in Malta managed to earn a very good reputation among students and parents ever since it was established in the 1930s. A former headteacher of the Housecraft School in the 1960s recalled:

In 1964, the school was at its peak. The girls were extremely eager to come over to the Housecraft School. The teachers were very dedicated. The school was bustling with activities. Sometimes we used to have a large number of pupils, as there were girls coming over from two different schools. They were divided into groups of ten, depending on the size of the group. They were taught some cooking and budgeting, went shopping for food; did some laundry work, such as washing some dishcloths and ironing and they were also taught some basic skills in housekeeping [Melissa, SSi].

Other participants also spoke highly of the school and shared their experiences of their visits. The following excerpts show evidence of the high profile that domestic subjects

enjoyed among both students and parents. A participant who attended the Housecraft School in Malta as a student described her experience as follows:

When I was 11 years old going on to 12, they started taking us to the Housecraft School [...] We used to be very excited on the day we were to go. At the Housecraft school we used to learn many basic skills. We used to go back home and tell our parents and siblings what we had learnt [...] We then used to do a follow-up with our class teacher at school [Phoebe, SSi].

A retired Gozitan primary school teacher also shared her fond memories regarding her time as a student at the Housecraft School in Gozo.

In 1948-49, our class used to visit the School once a month and we were taught housekeeping and cooking. However, we also did some child care too. When I became a primary school teacher and used to teach Standard VI practical, in 1964, I used to take my pupils to the Housecraft School. Things had changed. The premises were different and the children were only taught some simple cookery. That was all. It is true they learnt some table-manners and they did give a helping hand, but my experience at the Housecraft School was richer. As a young girl, my experience at the school was more holistic [Veronica, SSi].

The experiences provided by these women, who attended the only two Housecraft schools in the country, show the change in status of Housecraft teaching during the different periods, 1948-49, 1954-55 and 1964. The Housecraft School in Malta was better equipped to teach the various areas of the curriculum and the premises were larger than those at the Gozo School.

As rightly pointed out by Veronica, the programme of studies of the Housecraft School in Gozo presented a different type of Housecraft education to Gozitan girls. This was due to the new Housecraft syllabus introduced in 1955-56 which focused more on the practical aspect of the subject. However, a factor that made a great difference to the content delivered at the Gozo Housecraft School was the smaller premises, which were considered unsuitable for the purpose. The inadequacy of the Gozo School was also highlighted by the Gozitan Assistant Head responsible for the Housecraft School. During one of her training visits to England in 1956, she had been impressed with the large and well-equipped Housecraft rooms she had seen in schools. On her return to Malta, she argued that if the teaching of Housecraft was to be carried out on the new trends that were similar to what was being done in England, the teacher had to focus

on the students in order for them to gain more hands-on practical experience. She lamented that this could not be achieved due to the limited space available in the premises of the Housecraft school in Gozo (DEdF, No. 47/50, School Assistant Head to the Director of Education, dated 10 September 1956). The limited space available for the proper teaching of Housecraft restricted the topics that could be covered by the various teachers, as specific rooms were required for the teaching of the different areas (see Appendix 10 for a description of a typical day at the Housecraft School during 1966).

The role of the Housecraft School in Malta in securing a high status for the subject was evident from the popularity of the vocational courses, especially those organised for catering trainees and hotel staff. This was made possible by funds obtained from UNICEF in 1965/66, which were used to build three all-purpose rooms (RwDE 1965). One participant of this study, who attended one of these courses at the Housecraft School, provided a detailed account of the course structure which focused mainly on practical work. She recalled:

I attended the one-year course in 1967. I had never attended the Housecraft School when I was at Primary School so I was very eager to start the course. We were taught Cookery, Housekeeping, Laundry work, English, French and Italian. The group of students was divided into three and each group did specific tasks. We had a weekly roster and the daily routine was as follows: one group used to do Cookery, another Housecraft and another Laundry work [Mia, SSi].

It is interesting to point out that prior to the 1960s, the education authorities made several requests for additional centres where domestic subjects could be taught but these never materialized due to several reasons, mainly lack of funds and human resources. With the introduction of secondary education for all in the 1970s, the idea of expanding the schools, in Malta and Gozo never occurred and eventually they were closed down.

### **6.2.2 The Standard VI ‘practical’ classes in primary schools**

During the 1960s, the status of Housecraft witnessed an additional improvement in the status of the subject among the senior female pupils of the primary schools, especially in the ‘practical’ classes (see Chapter 3). Students attending these classes followed academic subjects along with Housecraft. In 1964, an FAO specialist in homemaking,



Dr Mary Elizabeth Keister, came over to Malta to report on the conditions under which Housecraft was being taught in Maltese schools. She was impressed by the efficient work carried out by the teachers despite the limitations of equipment and resources (RwDE 1964).

The practical slant given to Housecraft in the primary schools was especially evident in the Cookery lessons. This was highlighted by several of the participants of this study who taught a Standard VI ‘practical’ class in primary schools in Malta and Gozo:

In the Standard VI Practical, the students had a syllabus only for the academic subjects but nothing for Cookery. Every week, I used to plan ‘tea’ and make some cakes or prepare a meal together with the students in the staff room. We did not have a proper set-up of a Home Economics room, we only had a table cooker [...]. We had no training how to teach Cookery. It was only my choice to do Cookery. In other primary schools in Gozo, they never did Cookery. I was interested and I used to see the students enjoying themselves [Veronica, SSi].

In 1962, I was an emergency teacher for 6 months at a Primary School and I was assigned to teach the Standard VI ‘practical’ class. The Headmistress told me, “I know that you are very willing to teach them [the students] something, but they are not interested. If I get you a cooker, would you motivate them? I answered that I would do my best as they were a very small group [...] [Camellia, LHi].

I always taught Standard VI ‘practical’ as I trained as a primary teacher at the [Mater Admirabilis Training] College. I had no training in Housecraft or Cookery. I obtained my cooking skills from my mother. The students used to be very excited when I used to tell them that we were going to bake a cake. I used to carry out demonstrations as I had only one cooker. It was up to the headteacher to get us the equipment that we needed. My Headmistress was really interested and enthusiastic about Cookery, so we depended on her for the amount of equipment that she got for these Cookery sessions [Mollie, SSi].

A vivid description illustrating the enthusiasm of the teacher and the pupils of a Standard VI ‘practical’ class towards the practical aspect of the Home Economics was given by a participant who was at Mater Admirabilis Training College during the second half of the 1960s:

In 1966, I was posted to teach Housecraft in a primary school. The classroom was not very big, and it had an adjoining but very basic Home

Economics room. We had a very long wooden table, like a refectory table, and the children used to sit around it. There used to be some equipment, one or two ovens [...]. The head teachers always helped me greatly and gave me whatever I asked for [Kennedia, LHi].

Cookery, as part of Housecraft and later Home Economics, gained an increased popularity in its own right among all stakeholders. It was up to the school administration to seek funds to provide adequate resources to encourage the teaching of Cookery in primary schools. The funding of Housecraft/Cookery classes was a perennial problem for teachers and school administrators. Initially, funds were allocated for Housecraft classes in primary schools in their planning stages, but on completion the necessary equipment was not always made available (see DEdF, No. 137/59).

Over the years, the situation improved slightly in terms of financial assistance for the teaching of Housecraft and Needlework, especially through the UNICEF fund. During the scholastic year 1965/66, fourteen of the large primary schools received a supply of equipment, including a number of sewing machines, gas cookers and some kitchen utensils (RwDE 1965). This helped to ease the equipment shortage experienced in many of the Housecraft classes. In addition, these classes also required funds to purchase supplies for practical lessons. A special allowance for consumables, which varied along the years, was made available by the education authorities. In the scholastic year 1959/60, each primary school was initially granted one shilling and sixpence (1/6d) per child for the teaching of Domestic Science and Needlework. The authorities gave specific instructions to all Heads of primary schools regarding these funds for the provision of Housecraft and Needlework requirements.<sup>26</sup> From the draft estimates available for the same year, the amount allocated for Needlework and Domestic Science was substantial (DEdF, No. 137/59, the Accountant of the Education Department to Director of Education, 2 April 1959).<sup>27</sup> During the following decades,

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<sup>26</sup> In 1959, the Heads of primary schools were given some authority to manage and control a sum of money specifically allocated for requisites, visual aids and equipment. Needlework and Domestic Science were the only school subjects specifically allotted a sum of money to purchase various resources, including materials, equipment and sewing machines (DEdF, No. 137/59, the Accountant of the Education Department to Director of Education, 2 April 1959).

<sup>27</sup> The capitation grant amounted to £18,880, of which £2,000 were specifically allocated for Needlework and Domestic Science material, not including the grant per student for consumables during practical sessions (DEdF, No. 137/59, the Accountant of the Education Department to Director of Education, 2 April 1959).

the amount allocated for Home Economics and Needlework/Needlecraft teaching varied according to the various policies adopted by the Education Department.

### **6.2.3 The school of Our Lady of Joy**

The vocationally-oriented course organised by the Education Department at the school of Our Lady of Joy for the students of the senior classes of the primary school was also instrumental in consolidating the high status of Home Economics during the 1960s (see Chapter 3). This school was similar to the junior technical schools, also called ‘junior housewifery schools’ or ‘house training schools’ that were established in Britain in the 1930s, where 13 or 14 year old students trained in domestic subjects at a more advanced level than that covered in primary schooling (Sillitoe, 1966).

A retired teacher who taught at Our Lady of Joy since the school was first established in 1965-66, provided a detailed account of the school curriculum which shows how the various branches of Housecraft were taught as a vocational subject with the aim of providing these senior primary students/school leavers with the necessary skills to find employment.

The students were aged 14 and 15, and were recruited from government schools [...]. Apart from other subjects, the students were also taught Sewing, Cookery, Craft, Good Grooming, General Housecraft and Child Care. The students used to attend the Housecraft School as well, where they used to do First Aid under the guidance of the St John’s Ambulance, and Home Nursing. A health inspector from the Education Department used to give them lectures about health, food hygiene and certain types of diseases that affect small children and adults.

We had no syllabus, but we used to co-ordinate work between us [teachers] [...] and integrate the subjects we taught. I think that at that time we were already using a holistic approach, although we did not even know what that meant back then. I believe that we used to do more than what is done today. [Clover, LHi].

As clearly pointed out by Clover, there was no formal programme of studies for the school, as was the case of the curriculum for the Standard VI ‘practical’ classes in the primary schools. The teachers found themselves in a position where they had to design their own course in order to implement the aims established by the authorities. According to the testimony given by Clover, the teachers in this schools were willing to take the initiative to interpret the policies laid out by the authorities, in such a way

as to provide for the students' needs. Initially the group of students attending this course were referred to as 'the practical/Home Economics UNICEF class' as the programme had to focus on the practical aspect of the subject. Clover had sat for GCE 'O' level in Housecraft when she was at the grammar school and then she had trained as a Housecraft teacher at the Mater Admirabilis Training College in the early 1960s. Therefore, although she had never taught Housecraft in a secondary school, she was capable of designing a syllabus for the students attending the school of Our Lady of Joy, based on the practical aspects of Cookery. She had organised the syllabus according to what she had learnt at Mater Admirabilis Training College.

Inspectress Chetcuti was very keen on the way the school was run and the type of pedagogy used by the teachers. She promoted the school among prospective teachers at the Mater Admirabilis Teacher Training College where she also lectured.

Ms. Chetcuti liked to mention our school as an example, especially regarding the way we used to implement the correlation of subjects. She wanted her students [prospective teachers] to use this type of pedagogy when teaching Home Economics. Some years later, when Home Economics was introduced in the Secondary Schools, Ms. Chetcuti used our methods too. So although we did not have a syllabus, we never wasted out time [Clover, LHi].

At the time, the correlation among the different subjects was an innovative method in teaching. Home Economics was one of the leading subjects using such an advanced teaching style. This enhanced its status among other subjects on the general curriculum of primary and secondary schools.

The Education Department supported the school in many ways, most importantly by providing appropriate financial backing for its successful management. The allowance allocated for the demonstrations and practicals was substantial, as clearly pointed out by Clove: 'At that time, I was allowed to spend about £45 per month on groceries and detergents. It was a huge sum when compared to my salary which was £28. During my teaching career, I was never allowed to spend so much on consumables.'

The school also took part in activities organised by the Council of Europe and organised exhibitions to promote the work that was carried out by the staff and the students. The teachers were actively involved in showing the various skills that the

students were learning in the various areas of the school curriculum, especially in Needlework and Cookery. Schools were invited to attend these thematic exhibitions.

Hence, the Housecraft School improved the popularity of Housecraft/Home Economics on three fronts, by providing the taster programme to the senior students of the primary school, by organizing courses for school leavers at Our Lady of Joy, and by establishing the vocationally orientated courses for school leavers and adults. The practical slant of these courses was the key for their popularity as they provided the necessary skills considered useful for females, both at home and at work.

#### **6.2.4 Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary Technical School**

The status of Housecraft improved further with the establishment of Maria Assumpta Secondary Technical School for girls in 1959 (see Chapter 3). The school promoted practical subjects similar to the secondary modern schooling system in the UK (Purvis, 1985). Housecraft, Cookery and Needlework were among the most popular subjects of the school curriculum among students. The high status granted to these subjects was nurtured by the girls and teachers at the school. Two participants, who were students at the time, remarked:

My sister attended Maria Assumpta [secondary technical school] and she was studying Cookery [...] I used to see her prepare for the practicals and bring delicious food back from school. This was new for the family and I used to love it [Juniper, LHi].

My sister was a student at Maria Assumpta and when she used to come back from school, she used to tell me that she had a practical during Cookery. Sometimes she used to bring a cake, and on other occasions even a pie. She really enjoyed the subject. I always wanted to go there, so when I sat for the competitive examination at the end of primary school and I ranked 17<sup>th</sup>, I opted for this school against my parents' wishes. They expected me to opt for the grammar school. I really wanted to attend Maria Assumpta and choose the same subjects that my sister was studying [Cyclamen, LHi].

Another two participants who attended a girls' private grammar school and a girls' church school respectively noted:

Our children's neighbours used to attend Maria Assumpta and they constantly talked about school. They were really happy there. I sat for the selective examination at the end of the primary school and I passed. It was

a huge struggle to convince my parents that I wanted to go to Maria Assumpta. They wanted me to attend the grammar school. There was no Housecraft at my old school and although I was offered a scholarship by the Head, I refused. It was Housecraft that attracted me most to Maria Assumpta [...] [Marigold, LHi].

Home Economics was not taught at my school. However, I used to talk to my friends who lived in my neighbourhood and attended Maria Assumpta. The school had opened just recently. They told me that they had Cookery lessons, and I think they also had Needlecraft. But what struck me most was Cookery. I remember they used to tell me what they did at school and I thought “How lucky they are! We do not have anything of the sort at our school” [Kennedia, LHi].

The practical and vocational slant given to Housecraft, Cookery and Needlecraft was the main attraction of this school. Cookery must have been one of the most popular subject as one of the teachers who taught at the school vividly remembers:

The flatlet at Maria Assumpta was never vacant. We had students coming in and looking for different recipes. It was bustling with activity [...] [Camellia, LHi].

Another teacher added:

We also had open days where parents could visit to see the work of their children. We used to spend a whole day cooking different dishes [Juniper, LHi].

On public occasions, including open days and parents’ days, Cookery and Needlecraft teachers took the opportunity to display the work that was created and produced by their students in order to further promote the practical skills acquired by their students and as a result improve the subjects’ status.

Although the school was built according to international standards, the shortage of funds for equipment and accommodation were major problems especially during its initial years. In 1962, the Housecraft teachers proposed a new scheme to counter for the lack of adequate funding available for materials and equipment needed to prepare students for GCE examinations. They suggested that students taking Cookery could contribute towards half the cost of the food prepared during the lesson. In return, the students could take home what was cooked at school. The authorities found no objection to this new scheme since no funds were available, and introduced it on a trial

basis. The scheme was generally successful, and some of the amount collected from the students went towards purchasing meat and vegetables that were used during practicals. The scheme remained in place until June 1967, as by then sufficient funds were being allocated by the Education Department for practical cookery lessons (DEdF, No. 57/63).

### The Model Flat

During the 1950s and 1960s, when new girls' secondary schools were being built, the education authorities ensured that a model flat or flatlet for the practical teaching of Housecraft was included in each design. These model flats were designed more or less on the same layout of those found in the UK at the time (Yoxall, 1965; Purvis, 1985).

The new schools had space allocated in the Domestic Science block for either a large room designed with low dividing walls or a purposely built flat having separate rooms. Each flat required substantial funding for furnishing and equipment to serve its purpose. In 1962, the model flats at the Girls' Secondary Technical and at Maria Regina Grammar School at Blata l-Bajda were furnished concurrently as it was thought to be 'cheaper and quicker for the two schools to combine for this purpose' (DEdF, No. 1176/57/7, the Assistant Director to the Director of Education, 22 November 1960). These flats had a front hall, a kitchen, a dining room, a sitting room, a bedroom and a bathroom.<sup>28</sup> The total cost of each flat amounted to £500. These flatlets were indispensable for the proper teaching of Housecraft, especially when preparing students for the GCE examination in the subject. The flatlets were also intended 'as 'models' to future generations of Maltese housewives and mothers and anything which [...] [was] 'shoddy' or not in good taste [...] [was] to be strictly ruled out' (DEdF, No. 1176/57/7, the Director of Education and the Accountant General, November 1960). By the scholastic year 1962/63, the two flats, which were the very first to be built in local secondary schools in Malta, were completed and ready for use (DEdF, No. 400/72, Report by the Inspectress responsible for Home Economics and Needlecraft - 1971/72, 2 October 1972).

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<sup>28</sup> Refer to Appendix 11 for a plan of the Housecraft flat at the Girls' Grammar School at Blata l-Bajda in 1960.

### **6.2.5 The girls' grammar schools**

While the practical component was the main attraction of Housecraft, drawing many favourable comments from students, parents and school administrators of various educational institutions, it did not appeal to students who were more academically inclined. This situation was similar to that experienced in British grammar schools for girls (Purvis, 1985). At the girls' grammar schools, Housecraft and Needlecraft were less popular among students, as practical subjects were commonly considered suitable for low achievers in academic subjects. There were very limited facilities for Housecraft practical work to be conducted efficiently by teachers and students, and the Education Department failed to provide the necessary financial assistance to remedy the situation (see Chapter 3). Several requests were made to conduct practical work at the fully equipped Housecraft School and Maria Assumpta Secondary Technical School (RwDE 1961; RwDE 1962), but this was not always deemed feasible.

It was difficult for the subjects to gain recognition in such a highly academic environment. In the 1960s, despite a new approach introduced in Maltese girls' grammar schools, whereby the practical component was greatly emphasised in subjects like Housecraft and Needlecraft, teaching still focused mostly on theory and hardly involved any practical aspect at all.

Two retired Home Economics and Needlework teachers, who were students at the same grammar school in the early 1960s, expressed their disappointment in the way that the subject used to be taught at their school. They both attributed the lack of popularity of Housecraft to the teaching methods used by the teachers and also to the content of the syllabus. They would have preferred the subject to be of more a practical nature than what they experienced in their grammar school.

Housecraft was not interesting at all. The teacher used to dictate notes and we used to write them down. Sometimes she used to tell us to bracket certain sentences on the textbook, and we had to copy them too [...] The subject did not appeal to me at all. It was purely instructional, nothing creative. The content centred on things like how to wash a window, how to wash the floor, how to ventilate a room, the colour scheme of a room, etc. These things might be important, but they did not stimulate me as a person [Lily, LHi].



Home Economics as we know it today is totally different from the subject I learnt in 1959/60. We had theory lessons, and during practicals the teacher herself gave us demonstrations, for example on how to make a bed, etc. We had no food practicals. Our resources were limited to the bare minimum. The teacher dictated notes and we wrote them down. While dictating, she used to explain as well. She never gave us handouts [...] Most topics were useless and uninteresting [...] [Poppy LHi].

The syllabus change failed to bring about an improved perception of Housecraft at the girls' grammar school. A former student of Housecraft in another grammar school, maintained the huge emphasis given to home management skills:

In the mid-1960s, Housecraft was basically Home Management. Many topics have been removed from the Home Economics syllabus... It also had some cookery. The type of practical we had included what we used to call 'tasks', such as washing the cooker, cleaning the cupboard, cleaning the dining room and cleaning the bedroom or bathroom [Edelflower, LHi].

The strong focus on the theoretical aspect of the Housecraft syllabus in girls' grammar schools was justified since students intended to further their studies in areas leading to professional careers rather than to vocationally-oriented ones. However, the education authorities were in favour of presenting practical subjects in a more desirable way in order to change the perceptions of grammar school female students. This was carried out not only to attract more students to the subject but also to improve their performance in GCE examinations.

Despite every effort by the education authorities to provide them with all the necessary resources, the teachers were unwilling to implement the practical approach policy in Housecraft. The participants' remarks quoted above, regarding the pedagogies used by Housecraft teachers at the grammar schools, indicate the extent of the teachers' resistance against the new official policy. The school ethos, the abilities and aspirations of students, the resources available and the traditional teaching styles all contributed to the Housecraft teachers' stand against the new policy.

In Britain, the practical nature of these subjects never really boosted their popularity in grammar schools (Purvis, 1985). This was also the case in Malta. By scholastic year 1965-66, the number of students opting for the subjects decreased drastically due to the combination of subject choices in Form III. Explaining the reason for this change,

Ms Margaret Mortimer, the Assistant Director of Education, explained that taking Needlework and Housecraft meant that too much time was allotted to practical sessions, and that 8 periods a week ‘should not be devoted to practical work of this nature in a grammar school’ (DEdF, No. 429/63 - Assistant Director of Education to Director of Education, 1 June 1966). Despite this restriction in subject choices, by 1969 the number of grammar school girls studying domestic subjects up to GCE level remained significantly higher than that of other science options, as shown in Table 6.1.

Subjects	Schools			
	Maria Regina	St. Theresa	St. Louis	St Mary
Physics	236	68	-	42
Chemistry	236	68	-	42
Biology	59	34	-	10
Domestic Subjects	538	164	235	100

**Table 6.1:** Number of grammar school students opting for different subjects up to GCE at the end of Form I (Source: RwDE 1969).

#### 6.2.6 Home Economics and Needlecraft in comprehensive education

Following the introduction of secondary education for all in October 1970, Home Economics and Needlecraft formed part of the curriculum for Form I and Form II students as two of the compulsory subjects in all government secondary schools (see Chapter 3). The policy increased the importance of the subjects at secondary level. The widespread teaching of Home Economics and Needlecraft in these comprehensive schools brought about the need to establish fully equipped Home Economics and Needlecraft rooms in schools that were not previously used as grammar schools. The resources for these rooms were the responsibility of the education authorities. It took months for a number of subject rooms to be fully furnished. A new syllabus was drawn up for the subjects; the Home Economics syllabus focused especially on implementing a practical approach and the Needlecraft syllabus gave a more creative slant to the subject. As both subjects were compulsory for all the younger students of the secondary schools, their popularity increased further especially due to the increase in the number of practical sessions. The Home Economics syllabus was similar to that of the girls’ secondary technical school rather than that of the girls’ grammar school, especially as regards to the practical component. It focused more on cookery rather than on home management, as was previously the case in the latter type of school.

However, some topics in Housecraft were still present in the new version of the syllabus, and these required students to carry out some practical work related to home management in the flatlets.

In order to implement the practical part of Home Economics, financial support was required from the Education Department. When the new secondary schools were established, the amount allotted for practicals was similar to that given to the Housecraft/Cookery teachers at Maria Assumpta Girls' Technical School (DEdF, No. 230/71, Ass. Director of Education to Director of Education, 19 July 1971). The Heads of these secondary schools were instructed by the Director of Education to allocate a maximum amount of £3 for each Home Economics class per month (DEdF, No. 230/71, Director of Education to Headmistresses, 10 April 1971). This amount was revised various times during the following years. The amount allotted varied according to the subject, with Home Economics being allocated half the amount given to head teachers to purchase small equipment/materials (DEdC, Letter Circular No. 33/73). For instance in 1981, the food allowance for Home Economics practical work was revised due to an increase in the cost of living to Lm2.50 per month for Forms I and II classes, and Lm3 per month for Forms III to V classes.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the yearly allowance of Lm14 per Home Economics workshop for the purchase of sample cleaning materials was raised to Lm16 (DEdF, No. 230/71, Pullicino to Borg Bonnici, 23 February 1981/ 26 March 1981).

Some of the material resources needed for the teaching of Needlework lessons were usually requested from the stores at the Central Supplies Section of the Education Department. In 1971, a special allowance of £4 per year was available for the items not supplied by the Department or items needed in small quantities. The allocation increased to Lm6 a decade later (DEdF, No. 230/71, Pullicino to Borg Bonnici, 23 February 1981/26 March 1981).

#### Streaming by ability – the situation of Home Economics and Needlecraft in girls' secondary schools

In 1979, the decision to split and label the senior students of all the government secondary schools according to their ability and academic aspirations, referred to as

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<sup>29</sup> In 1972, Malta changed currency from the Maltese pound (£) to the Maltese Lira (Lm).

Group 1 and Group 2, brought about a very delicate situation for Home Economics and Needlecraft. So far, comprehensive education established in the 1970s had favoured these two subjects by making them available for all Form I and Form II students, irrespective of their abilities and by providing adequate material resources to meet their practical needs. In addition, Home Economics and Needlecraft were also popular with a good number of students who opted for them in Forms III. Ball (1981) argued that low ability students are directed towards the practical and low status subjects, while the brighter students are streamed towards the more academic oriented subjects. This was the case in Maltese government schools in September 1979.

At the time, my experience as a Form II student attending a government school, when this policy was implemented, confirms what Ball (1981) found in his case study of a comprehensive school in the UK. When I was about to make the subject choices for Form III, I was not influenced to choose the academic group, Group 1. However, I opted for this group and chose Home Economics and Needlework. I was told that Group 2 was suitable for the low ability students who could barely read and write. The following year, I was sent to a larger school which was in the same catchment area and I was placed in a class where students opted for science subjects. There were some who had chosen Biology and Home Economics. I was one of only three students who had opted for both Home Economics and Needlework in class. The Home Economics group was small; it consisted of not more than seven students. It seems that we were the only ones opting for Home Economics in the academically oriented group. The situation was worse as regards the number of students who opted for Needlework in Group 1. I was one of only three students who opted for Needlework in Group 1 from the whole school. In fact, in the following years, we were joined with a Group 2 Needlework class. When we reached Form V, I was the only student from the whole school who sat for the GCE 'O' level in the subject. The others either left school early or were not interested in sitting for the examination. My experience reflects the situation of Home Economics and Needlework in government schools at the time when the selection of students according to ability was carried out within comprehensive schooling.

The relationship between students' abilities and subject choice was also emphasised by one of the participants of this study, who had chosen Home Economics and Needlework when she was attending a government secondary school:

I was very happy there, even within the group. But one thing that really bothered me was that we were always streamed as the last class. Physics, Chemistry and Biology were the A class [e.g. Form VA], the others were B, C, D, E, etc. It used to bother us being always the H class every year. It could have been unintentional, I don't know [Marigold, LHi].

The higher consideration given to academic subjects and the number of students opting for them were the main reasons for allotting the first few classes to these subjects. Two different sets of syllabi were prepared for the different groups. The syllabus drawn up for the Group 2 students mostly focused on the utilitarian aspect of the subjects. The emphasis on the practical component was required to motivate the students and provide them with basic culinary and home management skills deemed to be essential for life.

We had two syllabi. One was for those who were to sit for the examination, and another for those who weren't. We used to refer to them as syllabus A and syllabus B. The difference was basically in the number of practicals the students to do. They used to do basic things and the subject was more hands-on. At a glance, the syllabi seemed to be the same, but then if you analyse them well you find that the knowledge expected from the students was different [...] The half-yearly exam papers were school-based for the second group, while the exam papers for Group 1 were set by the Education Department [Marigold, LHi].

#### **6.2.7 The subjects at the girls' trade schools**

The curriculum of the girls' trade schools focused on the more traditional female crafts (See Chapter 3). The subjects taught in these schools were thought to be useful for the newly established textile industry in Malta. In a drive to attract more students to trade schools and improve their motivation towards schooling, the education authorities gradually added several new trades related to Needlework in the curriculum. These included soft-toy making, machine knitting and wickerwork.

When the girls' trade schools were established they focused on Textiles. In fact, the whole syllabus focused on Textiles, with the exception of the teaching of Maltese and English language. I think that the subject

flourished because the textiles factories wanted schools to train machine operators. They were only interested in machine operators! [Jasmine, LHi].

Despite the attempts to provide students with a varied and vocationally oriented curriculum, attendance at the trade schools was very low. This was mainly due to the type of curriculum that channelled the students to low-waged unskilled work (Pullicino, 1989), and was also due to the unmotivated cohort of students whose sole aim was to leave school and find employment.

Very few Home Economics and Needlework qualified teachers taught in trade schools, where teaching staff mostly comprised were Instructors. Some participants who had experience in the girls' trade schools lamented about the behavioural problems they faced while teaching in these schools. Although Home Economics was usually a well-liked subject among low ability, non-academic students, the only thing that attracted the trade school girls seemed to be the practical component of the subject.

The trade school headmistress used to give me a free hand. There were some really impossible girls, and I used to get very agitated. She used to tell me "Don't worry, just do what they want. If they want a practical, do a practical". I had a very free hand, but they did not want to do any theory whatsoever [Clover, LHi].

A participant, who was a headmistress of one of these trade schools, tried to motivate the students through Home Economics practicals.

When I took up my post as a trade school headteacher, I told the teachers "Shouting at these kids is perfectly useless". We had some fields nearby and I told the gardeners to plant lettuce, tomatoes, beans and cabbages [...]. I told the teachers to start teaching them how to make nutritious sandwiches. We gave them a scope at school. We also taught them how to dress properly because their appearance was always scruffy [Phoebe, SSi].

The challenges that were encountered by the administration and teachers in the school were far from what was expected. Needlework-related subjects were perceived to be the best vocational options for females of lower ability and motivation by the Education Department. However, this move was not as successful as one might have hoped. Training for Trade School teachers was seen to be one was of tackling the problems encountered in these schools. In 1981, the Faculty of Education of the

University and the Department of Education planned an evening Diploma course in Home Economics and Needlecraft. These were aimed at improving the qualifications of those teachers who were already in service and of those instructors in Trade Schools who were not suitably qualified. These two-year Diploma courses were launched in October 1982 (RwGD 1981; 1982).

#### **6.2.8 Home Economics and Needlecraft in a highly academic environment**

In 1981, the status of Home Economics and Needlecraft suffered a surprising setback when they remained no longer compulsory for girls in Form I and II who started attending the newly established junior lyceums (see Chapter 2). The government decision to abandon comprehensive education and once again introduce a tripartite system was a big blow to the Home Economics and Needlecraft community. The compulsory status awarded to the subjects for so many years proved not only beneficial for students but also to their families. Although students attending these schools were highly motivated and academically oriented, the subjects' reputation in the upper forms increased very slowly. Initially, the groups opting for the subjects were small when compared to those at the secondary schools. I was one of the first students who attended the Junior Lyceum and chose Home Economics and Needlecraft. There were only two of us who chose these subjects, since most of our classmates opted for languages as subject options. Despite such a small number of students, the subjects were still offered at the school. Irrespective of the low response, the authorities were determined to keep Home Economics and Needlecraft in the school curriculum at the Junior Lyceum. From my perspective as a student, the one-to-two ratio was quite awkward and uncomfortable, but from the authorities' point of view it was important to kick-start the teaching of the subjects at the school, before extending it to the other girls' junior lyceums across the island. A number of my participants who taught for many years at the first girls' Junior Lyceum shared some of their experiences about Home Economics as a practical subject taught to highly motivated students. It is important to note that initially the academic standard of the students attending the junior lyceums was very high. The following two excerpts highlight the changes that occurred in Home Economics. The first account describes the situation during the initial years when the first junior lyceum was established, and the second provides a clear picture of the state of Home Economics about thirty years later, in 2010.

Initially, the groups were small and I only had four or five students in Form V. They were very few. I had slightly larger numbers in Forms III and IV [...]. The students were very motivated and they passed their GCEs with flying colours [Kennedia, LHi].

Initially, in Form I, students are very excited to do practicals. The practical aspect of the subject motivates them and attracts them to it. They are fascinated by the idea that they create something new. [...] When the students reach Form V, they really work hard during practicals, and they are worn out and exhausted by the end of the lesson. As you know, Home Economics is very tiring, especially the practicals. So on reaching Form V, their eagerness for the subject dwindles. They want to get the practicals over and done with, so they can continue with the lessons of other subjects. So the subject loses some of its attraction [Juniper, LHi].

The latter account seems to replicate the description of what had happened in the girls' grammar schools during the 1960s. The practical component of the subject had begun a gradual decline in popularity. What for many years proved to be the subject's major attraction lost its appeal by the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The popularity curve of Needlework, later Needlecraft, was different in the various girls' junior lyceums with respect to Home Economics. When the option was re-introduced for students in Form I and Form II, the syllabus increased creativity in the practical component. Although the number of students opting for Needlecraft was much less than that of Home Economics, there was a steady flow of students who were attracted towards Needlecraft.

Numbers varied. There were times when I had twelve students for 'O' level. I never had less than six or seven. Normally I had seven or eight. Then there would be a year when I would have only one or two. I can pinpoint why. There was the problem that students could not choose Home Economics and Textiles Studies together. It was a problem with choice of subjects [Cyclamen, LHi].

Although every effort was made by the Education Officer and the HoDs to promote a more creative approach to the subject, other curricular pressures, such as the increased number of optional subjects available, influenced the number of students opting for Needlecraft and resulted in a decline.



### **6.3 The introduction of D&T and Personal and Social Development (PSD) - a threat for the status of Home Economics and Textiles Studies**

The launch of D&T in 2000 provoked an upheaval within the Home Economics and Textiles Studies community. The government at the time supported the introduction of this subject and provided funds for fully-equipped D&T rooms, according to its official policy of developing technology in Maltese schools. The run-down Home Economics and Textiles Studies rooms were refurbished as Food and Textiles Technology laboratories for D&T, and new ones were designed according to D&T requirements. During my visits in schools to assess student teachers, I became aware that these laboratories were to be used for all three subjects. Inevitably, many disputes arose among Home Economics, Textiles Studies and Food and Textiles Technology teachers in various schools over the management of these laboratories. Timetabling also proved to be problematic, with teachers struggling to fit in practical work in these rooms. A participant explained:

We use the Home Economics room for all our lessons. Since the introduction of D&T in our school, the Food Technology teacher thinks that she has a right to use the room all the time. She is still a new graduate and she thinks that she can come here and be arrogant. She said that they were told that they had priority over Home Economics teachers to use the room. I spoke to her very nicely and I managed to convince her that things aren't done that way [Juniper, LHi].

A Textiles Studies teacher found other practical difficulties when sharing her room:

We use another room, apart from this one [refers to the Textiles Studies room]. We placed two sewing machines in there so that students do not miss doing practical work when this room is being used by the D&T teacher. My subject involves mostly practical work. [...] If those in charge of the D&T are going to tell me, "Pack up and give your lessons in a normal classroom", our subject is not going to be practical anymore. The other room, that I have previously mentioned, is intended to house a CNC [Computer Numerical Control] machine. Once they start using it for this purpose, I will no longer have a space where I can take my students. Therefore, I will end up in a normal classroom without computers, sewing machines, etc [...] [Cyclamen, LHi].

A participant who was involved in D&T had this different perspective about the issue of ownership:

One of the big problems faced by D&T is ownership of the food rooms. There have been schools where food labs were set up, then a Home Economics person took over the room and now the Food Technology person can only use the room when nobody else is using it. They [Home Economics teachers] make sure to use the room as much as they can. This problem has been very grossly overseen by authorities. It didn't happen in every school or anything like that, but it did cause some problems [Dill, SSi].

Other problems arose apart from timetabling. When the rooms were designed, the architect in charge planned a different layout from the original ones that were used for Home Economics and Textiles Studies rooms. During my observations, I noticed that the new food laboratories do not have enough cooking stations to cater for groups of sixteen students, the maximum number of students allowed for all practical lessons. Home Economics teachers were complaining that it was impossible to have only four cookers in a room that previously accommodated five or six units (Informal conversation with Home Economics teachers, April/May 2010).

During these past few years, the struggle for status was reflected in the number of students opting for D&T, Home Economics and Textiles Studies. Until recently, all three subjects were offered as option choices in Form I and Form III in all government secondary schools and most church and independent schools. In some schools, Home Economics was still quite popular, especially in girls' secondary schools, while in boys' secondary schools, students shifted their choice towards the relatively new D&T, which seems to be more appealing (Informal conversations with Home Economics and Textiles Studies teachers, March/April, 2010). The status of D&T continued to improve after being included as a subject for SEC examination in 2008. Some participants shared their preoccupation towards the issue of subject choice:

As a teacher in a boys' junior lyceum, I know that students choose D&T in favour of Home Economics as they know that it is varied. They have electronics, resistant material, food and textiles which make the subject very appealing. This is making Home Economics less popular among boys. I do understand that boys prefer subjects like Computer Studies, Business Studies, D&T, etc...instead of Home Economics. They believe that these subjects provide more job opportunities, especially as a lot of importance is given to science and technology [Starflower, Home Economics FGd].

We always had a good number of students opting for Home Economics in my school [Girls' Junior Lyceum]. Although new subjects were introduced, students still prefer our subject. [...] There were loads of threats that Home Economics would no longer be taught in schools. We still have a very good number of students who opt for it. Although it is a junior lyceum, the number of students choosing Home Economics is good. We compare well with the Sciences and Computer Studies. [...] These past ten years, we always had a good number of students. The number of students opting for it actually increased [Juniper LHi].

Further issues concerning subject boundaries also emerged following the establishment of PSD in the same period. Although PSD and Home Economics were kept separate when the NMC was implemented in schools, some of the topics that were exclusively within the Home Economics domain were transferred to PSD and others, particularly nutrition, health and consumer issues, were delivered by both subject specialists. PSD was offered as a core subject to all students from Form I to Form V but Home Economics remained optional throughout.

On its part, Textiles Studies was never mentioned in the NMC. Textiles Studies teachers felt that the subject was taking a slow exit from the Maltese curriculum, although much hard work had been done to make it more appealing for students. A participant made the following comments:

In the past, Needlework, Home Economics and Art were all compulsory in Form I and Form II. PSD and D&T did not even exist. That is why the education authorities want to get rid of our subject, they want to replace it with another subject [...] When it was no longer compulsory, the number of students choosing the subject was small. The policy at the Education Department is that if there are less than five students opting for a subject in Form III, it is not to be offered and students have to choose something else. [...] When you have minor subjects like Textiles Studies, you cannot refrain from offering the subject because there are only five students. These subjects are niches and you cannot eliminate them from the curriculum [Cyclamen, LHi].

The status of Textiles Studies has been on the decline for decades. Attempts have been made to improve its image and remove the stigma of it being solely related to sewing and mending. An overhaul in the content of the syllabus was made during the years (see Chapter 9). In spite of all the effort done by the Education Officer, HoDs and teachers, the number of students opting for the subject continued to decrease (Informal

conversations with Textiles Studies teachers, March/April, 2010). This is evident in the number of students sitting for the SEC examination in Textiles and Design (T&D), as the subject is officially called by the MATSEC Examinations Board, as shown in Table 6.2.

YEAR	SCHOOLS				TOTAL
	STATE SCHOOLS	CHURCH SCHOOLS	INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS	PRIVATE CANDIDATES	
2001	44	0	0	2	46
2002	30	0	0	8	38
2003	30	0	0	1	31
2004	27	0	0	3	30
2005	31	0	0	2	33
2006	33	0	0	0	34
2007	29	0	0	1	30
2008	25	0	0	0	25
2009	29	0	0	0	29
2010	24	0	0	1	25

**Table 6.2:** Number of candidates sitting for the SEC Examination in T&D (Source: MATSEC Newsletters and Statistical Reports, 2001-2010).

#### 6.4 The promotion of the vocational aspect of Home Economics

The vocational orientation had also been one of the main attractions of Home Economics that enticed students to opt for the subject. For many years, HoDs and subject teachers had been involved in delivering talks, known as ‘option talks’, to parents and students who were in the process of choosing subjects, either for Form I or for Form III.

Students are still attracted to the subject because there is the practical component. But there are the job prospects that attract them, too. I usually give a talk to the Form IIs, during their ‘option talks’. When I mention

that the subject can lead you to occupations in the beauty and hairdressing industry, as kindergarten assistants, to teaching or continue at the Institute of Tourism Studies, they become very interested [Juniper, LHi].

In some cases, career guidance teachers make these option talks. The responsibility for these talks constantly changes, depending on the policies adopted by the education authorities at the time. The status given to the various subjects, including Home Economics and Textiles Studies, is often influenced by the way they are presented by those who present the option talks in schools. A number of participants in this study complained about the low status given to the subjects by some of these career guidance teachers. When I personally attended one of these option talks as a parent, the guidance teacher who was giving a presentation on the subjects available as options for students going into Form I, also mentioned Home Economics. She gave a wrong description of what the subject involves, and gave the impression that nothing had changed since she herself had studied Housecraft in the 1960s. Instead of highlighting the vocational opportunities offered by the subjects, she limited her arguments to the attainment of basic practical skills for everyday life, such as shoe polishing. This incident reinforced my conviction that lack of information and inaccurate knowledge of the subject area contribute to keep the status of Home Economics and Textiles Studies at a low level, thus failing to highlight the benefits of learning these subjects.

In spite of the negative status attributed to the subjects by some individuals who were in a position to influence students in their choice of subjects, the practical and vocational orientation was still a strong point of Home Economics. When in the 1990s, the subject was offered also to male students in the secondary schools, a significant factor that greatly influenced the popularity of the subject was its vocational orientation. At the time, ITS had just opened its doors for students who were interested in furthering their studies in careers related to the hospitality industry. Many boys attending secondary schools opted for Home Economics with the aim of following post-secondary qualifications at ITS after they finished school. The Education Officer responsible for Home Economics and Textiles Studies at the time, who was on the Board of Governors of ITS, was instrumental in securing a place for Home Economics as one of the preferred subjects for entry into various courses in this institution. This created a boost in the number of boys opting for Home Economics in schools. One of the participants made this observation about the usefulness of the subject:

When Home Economics was introduced at ITS, people were viewing the subject in a different light. They knew that it led to a specific career. It was no longer solely thought that Home Economics is useful for life. I encountered many parents who wanted their children to choose the subject for this reason [Marigold, LHi].

According to one of the participants of the focus group, Home Economics was chosen by boys in her school as a ‘stepping stone’ to enter ITS [Betty, Home Economics FGd]. She lamented that:

Unfortunately, direct career openings are still very narrow. That is why I feel that we need to accept the reality that our subject is chosen as a filler. We need to accommodate these students too. I feel that if we just focus on those who want to pursue a career, for instance at ITS, we will end up with a very small group. The life skills component needs to be advertised better, especially during option talks. Home Economics is a good option for later use [Betty, Home Economics FGd].

The highly utilitarian content of the Home Economics syllabus, referred to by some of the participants as “useful for life”, “life skills”, “common sense” and “general knowledge”, has attracted students towards the subject with the aim of following ‘non-professional vocations’ (Goodson, 1983, p. 29). Many secondary school students who opt for Home Economics are still attracted by its relevance to a career, namely the courses offered by ITS and the Institute of Community Services through MCAST. Measor’s argument that the popularity of a subject depends on its ‘instrumental job value’ (1984, p. 213) is even more relevant in the current economic climate.

### **6.5 Home Economics and Textiles Studies beyond secondary education**

The number of students who choose to follow a professional career in Home Economics and Textiles Studies is small when compared to that of students who opt for the subject at secondary level. For many years, the only way of obtaining qualifications that could lead to a profession was through Mater Admirabilis Training College for Women Teachers and the University of Malta.

The subject’s popularity was also evident at the Mater Admirabilis Training College (see Chapter 3). Some of the first student-teachers who opted to study Housecraft in 1960, did not possess any formal qualifications in the subject. One of them have nostalgic memories of those early days at the College:

When I went to College, I initially intended to opt for Mathematics as a special subject but when they offered Housecraft, somehow it attracted me. I had never done Housecraft in my life and it never occurred to me to choose it when I attended secondary school...I knew that there was a Housecraft School and when the lecturers at the College asked us which subjects we wished to choose, they told us that a new subject called Housecraft was going to be introduced. They even got a teacher to speak to us about it [Rose, LHi].

The College Principal, Sr Mary McCallum, was influential on the status accorded to this practical subject at the Training College during the 1960s. She played an important role in supplying qualified subject teachers in areas that lacked properly-trained personnel. Support was also given in terms of material resources; a Home Economics and a Needlecraft room were built and equipped for the purpose of training Housecraft and Needlework teachers. One participant stated that:

Sr McCallum was very helpful, as the trend at the time was in favour of practical subjects [...] the subject enjoyed the same respect as English and Mathematics [Daffodil, LHi].

I remember Sr McCallum, wanting me to opt out from English. I had Home Economics as well when I was at school, so I was encouraged to train in that department [Myrtle, LHi].

Another participant who attended Mater Admirabilis Training College in 1965 and specialised in Housecraft/Home Economics made the following remarks about the surge in the subject's popularity as half of the cohort of prospective teachers opted for Home Economics:

When I chose Home Economics, half of the students did so too. The attraction was that we would prepare things and eat as well. We were 140 students at the time, and 70 wanted Home Economics. The Home Economics room, however, could only take sixteen of us, in groups of four, just like we used to do in schools until recently. We anxiously waited for the Principal's decision on who was to be awarded those places. I was quite pessimistic about my chances because I did not have an 'O' level in Home Economics. My former school did not offer it. We waited almost a fortnight for the list of names, and I was among those selected. I was elated [Kennedia, LHi].

There could have been a number of reasons for the increased demand for the Home Economics at the females' Teacher Training College. Kennedia argued that:

The presence of food was very important. This was a serious issue because it was well known that meal portions at the College were rather small. So if we did not eat the food at the refectory, we could eat what we prepared in the Home Economics lesson. This could have been one of the reasons. Maybe some used to say that there wasn't much to study in the subject, but this was not true at all [Kennedia, LHi].

The strong practical slant of Home Economics could have given students the impression that there was less content to study and was therefore a soft option. However, those who opted for the subject as an area of specialisation at Mater Admirabilis Training College thinking that it was an easy subject would have had to face a substantial amount of practical and theoretical work.

We were given lots of theory, and it surely was not just a practical subject. There was theory as well [Kennedia, LHi].

We used to have between 3 to 4 hours of theory lessons in Home Economics. Then we used to have half a day of practical [Camellia, LHi].

The practical side of the subject required long stretches of time, also at University as one participant clearly remembers.

We used to do many practicals. Every three hours of practical counted as one hour at University. So we needed 48 hours to accumulate one credit. It was very tough. When the other students would have finished their lectures at the end of the year and started studying, we would still be going on and on [Marigold, LHi].

As the above comment clearly indicates, the experience of long sessions of practical work put those prospective teachers who chose to specialise in Home Economics at a disadvantage.

When the Faculty of Education was established in 1978, it provided a teaching degree in Home Economics/Food and Nutrition and Home Economics/Dress and Fabric. Unlike the situation faced at Mater Admirabilis, where the number of students opting for the subjects exceeded the available places, the University faced a shortage of students applying for this specialisation. The reasons, pointed out in Chapter 3, included the lack of sponsorship by the Department of Education, the low number of interested students and the insufficiently qualified students in the subjects. There were instances when prospective students without the appropriate qualifications in the



subjects, an Advanced level qualification in Home Economics and/or Needlecraft, were admitted to the course.<sup>30</sup> This was seen to be inappropriate and unfair by those who considered Home Economics as a marginal subject.

A degree in teaching has been the only route for those who wanted to pursue a professional career in Home Economics and Textiles Studies (see Appendix 12 for the number of undergraduate students opting for a B.Ed. (Hons) Home Economics/NFCS at the University of Malta). In countries, such as the US, Australia, UK and some European countries, those who wish to specialise in Home Economics and Textiles Studies can opt for a number of qualifications leading to a variety of professional careers other than teaching (e.g. Goldstein, 1997; Home Economics Institute of Australia, 2012; Jepson, 2000; Turkki, 2000). Unfortunately, careers in consumer affairs, food, textiles, health and management have never been pursued by students studying the subject in Malta. There have been very few instances where graduates in Home Economics and Textiles Studies have been consulted to give advice or to perform some work related to their field. A participant described this issue as follows:

One thing which never materialised was the employment of home economists in occupations related to finance, health and housing. This link was never made. However, there were some who helped or worked for a very short period in government departments or NGOs related to environment and money management [Jasmine, LHi].

In the US, for example, extension work is performed by extension agents qualified in Family and Consumer Sciences (previously called Home Economics). The extension agents develop programmes that are designed to improve the well-being of a community. These programmes focus on the needs of the members of a particular community. In Malta, the Home Economics Seminar Centre has been one of the main contributors by extending its services to the community. It has become the role of these Home Economics graduates, who possess a Bachelor Degree in Education and

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<sup>30</sup> Respondents for this study highlighted the fact that there were years when no students opted for Home Economics in the teaching degree course. Sophie, who was an undergraduate at the time, stated that there were two years when no one joined the course. After that, a student was admitted without the necessary Advanced level qualifications in the subject. This was common knowledge among the subject's community. She had all the necessary university entry requirements, but opted for this specialisation due to the publicity campaign for more Home Economics teachers.

are employed by the Education Directorate, to perform extension work in the community. One participant recalled:

One of the goals of setting up the Home Economics Centre was that it could reach the community by offering courses for particular groups. It is interesting how it developed and that is what they are doing now. The staff at the Home Economics Seminar Centre go to NGOs, day-care centres within the different parishes and women's groups. Only a few individual Home Economics graduates do any such extension work after their working hours. Nothing full time as yet [Sophie, SSi].

Over the last few years, in addition to the programmes organised for school children and their parents, the Centre extended its service outside the schools by giving talks and seminars in parish groups, local councils, parents' and teachers' associations and in a number of community groups (ARGDme – 2006; 2007; 2008). In more recent years, the Centre also delivered tailor-made intervention programmes to small groups of participants in schools and other entities on various topics (see Appendix 13 for a list of programmes organised by the Home Economics Seminar Centre).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

Despite the widespread perception of Home Economics and Textiles Studies as low-status subjects due to their prevalent practical and vocational slant, the history of the subjects and the experiences of teachers and students show that these two characteristics have in fact proved to be their strong points. They were also appreciated by the education authorities and by Maltese society, which reaped their benefits through time. However, lack of academic status was a hurdle constantly faced by the subjects in the curriculum, by the subject teachers and the students themselves. The subjects struggled for respect and survival, experiencing highs and lows according to changing circumstances. Such changes also had an impact on the resources allocated to the subject, whose practical orientation required substantial investment. In certain cases, the subjects struggled because of lack of allocated resources rather than due to a specific design to undermine their position in the school curriculum.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **GENDER ISSUES IN HOME ECONOMICS AND TEXTILES STUDIES**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides an analysis of the relationship between the evolution of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta, and gender issues in the Catholic and patriarchal society of the Mediterranean island. It presents a critical account of how gender issues evolved through the years leading to Home Economics being offered as a subject option to boys. The chapter also delves into the impact of males on the subject's community which has been traditionally dominated by females. Finally, an analysis of the subjects' curricula focuses on modifications that were made in order to offer a less domestic and gender biased content to students.

#### **7.1. The evolving attitudes of the Maltese Department of Education towards domestic education**

The highly patriarchal Maltese culture was conducive to the Education Department's efforts to train girls how to be responsible housewives. It was specifically indicated in the various curricula of the first half of the twentieth century that girls were to be taught Domestic Economy or Housecraft and Needlework, and boys were to study Woodwork (Sultana, 1992). Moreover, the policy of teaching different subjects to boys and girls was strengthened by the opening of a Housecraft School in 1931, which aimed to develop the various aspects of housecraft in order to make female pupils more accustomed to manual and domestic work (RwGD 1930-31) (see Chapter 3).

The organisation of the Housecraft School followed that of the British home-making centres as it focused mainly on the tasks that were performed by working class women at home, which were housework, cooking and laundry work (Yoxall, 1965). The value of teaching the different areas of domestic subjects to female students attending the Housecraft School was clearly articulated by the Director of Education in the 1948-54 annual report:

The beneficial influence of a good woman both in the home and outside will always remain incalculably greater whatever the conditions or the social sphere in which she moves [...] And to teach the modern girl this art

[housecraft], together with the devotion and unselfishness that should go with it, is the objective at which we must aim on the training of girls (RwDE 1948-54, p. XXVI).

However, the teaching of domestic education at the Housecraft School was locally criticised for its gender bias. Darmanin (1992) claimed that this form of education was a ‘deliberate suppression of the ambition of the working-class girls to move beyond the narrow gender and class limits of their situation’ (p. 106). She argued that the ideology of the education authorities strengthened gender stereotyping by showing that it was important for working class girls to embrace their domestic role, hence fulfilling their ‘ideals of femininity’ (p. 107).

This perception was further evident in the annual report of 1948-54, where the Director of Education clearly discriminated against those girls who did not proceed to secondary schooling and remained in primary school, as he expected that they would have limited opportunities to enter the labour market (RwDE 1948-54).

[...] the training envisaged for girls is a matter of national concern: perhaps even more so than the preparation for life considered essential for boys. For whereas the latter may in many cases have the opportunities for further training in the place of work which they attend, in the case of girls they cannot hope for much further preparation in [the] all important matter of managing a home and bringing up a family (p. XV).

Hence, the teaching of Domestic Science/Housecraft to all the primary school senior girls was of utmost importance for the education authorities, especially as many girls left school before proceeding to secondary school. Furthermore, during the 1960s, the primary curriculum was revised and special emphasis was given to Citizenship Education, Arts and Crafts and Home Economics *for girls* [my emphasis] (RwDE 1965).<sup>31</sup> The Housecraft syllabus was drastically reviewed to cater for the needs of society and to adapt to modern pedagogical trends that were current at the time. A fairly strong emphasis on domesticity is evident from the following excerpt of the subject’s syllabus:

The course is centred round the growing girl who, at this age, is particularly eager to look attractive to others and to be accepted by her

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<sup>31</sup> This was the first time that the subject was referred to as Home Economics and not Domestic Science or Housecraft in an official document.

friends. Its aims at providing an all-round education for the girls and at helping them become good homemakers who can build happy homes.

It is of vital importance for the girls to learn the basis of good human relationship, to be courteous and good-mannered to others. Thus, social education should pervade all the teaching in this field. The girls should be trained in good taste and discrimination in matters of dress and furnishing; and since health habits are so fundamental in the acquisition of the desired freshness and smartness, the girls should be encouraged to practice them in and out of school (DEdF, No. 18/65, The Reprint of Primary School Syllabus for Home Economics, Standards V to VI Advanced, np).

Reinforced gender stereotyping through the teaching of domestic subjects was not only taken for granted in Malta, but it was seen as a crucial factor in providing society with females who could carry out their role as wives and mothers in the best possible way.

## **7.2 The influence of the strong traditional Maltese values regarding marriage and family**

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Maltese education authorities sought to improve girls' education, not only in the primary but also in the secondary/grammar sector. Strengthening girls' grammar schools was important as more females enjoyed improving career prospects. By 1959, nursing and teaching were the two mostly sought-after careers by females who finished grammar school (RwDE 1959). It was difficult at the time to convince females to study beyond secondary education, as the dominant ideology in Maltese society exerted pressure on them to marry at a relatively young age and to start a family. This was evident from the comments made by the Director of Education in his reports in 1959 and 1961:

Many girls marry young in Malta and the years (usually few) between leaving school and marriage are regarded as the ideal time for the young woman to lay aside such earnings as immediate employment affords her (RwDE 1959, p.7).

The object of these schools [the Girls' Grammar Schools, in Malta and Gozo] is to prepare girls to take their place as educated Catholic women in modern society. Great importance is attached to the training of character and thus preparing women both for employment and for home making (RwDE 1961, p. 17).

The ideology of the Education Department and that of the Catholic Church on the importance of domestic education for girls to strengthen the role of women in family

life benefitted the Housecraft/Home Economics and Needlework/Needlecraft community, which included inspectress, teachers, pupils and parents who considered it useful for their daughters to learn the subjects. The popularity of the subjects continued for many decades until the 1980s, when the junior lyceums were established and the tripartite system was introduced.

### **7.3 A similar curriculum for boys and girls**

The drive by the Maltese Education Department to offer a similar curriculum to boys and girls in the newly established junior lyceums in 1981, meant that Home Economics and Needlecraft were removed from the list of compulsory subjects for female students in Form I and Form II (11- and 12-year olds), and only offered as options in Form III. The Home Economics and Needlecraft community was disappointed with the decision taken by the Department, and both the subjects' association and the Education Officer responsible for Home Economics and Needlecraft communicated with the Minister of Education to try to rectify this change of policy.

Joyce Pullicino, who was the Education Officer at the time wrote to the Minister of Education highlighting this issue, the rationale of the teaching of Home Economics and Needlecraft in Maltese schools, and their indirect impact on the government's policies:

Home Economics actively educates pupils to co-operate with the government in its effort to reduce the incidence of diabetes, avoid pollution, control infectious diseases, avoid accidents, save water and energy, avoid waste of material, keep the country clean and any other national needs that arise from time to time.

In so doing its contribution to the economy of the country and to the well-being of its citizens is valuable and cannot be ignored (DEdF, No. 400/72 - Education Officer to Minister of Education, 17 November 1981).

Pullicino highlighted further that the Department's decision to remove the subjects was not in accordance with the position taken by the UN, UNESCO and the Council of Europe on education and gender. She suggested that a special course for boys be introduced at the junior lyceum, which would include topics related to consumer education, nutrition, the environment, safety and hygiene in the home, housing and home management (DEdF, No. 400/72 - Education Officer to Minister of Education,

17 November 1981). This was an important step for the introduction of Home Economics for boys, which eventually took place ten years later.

The subjects' association also showed its concern by writing to the Minister of Education (HENTA Archives, Correspondence, 10 October 1981). The committee lamented that if the subjects were not available to the lower forms, it was unlikely that students would choose them in Form III. It argued that as Home Economics and Needlework require practical skills, beside theoretical knowledge, students need time to grasp these skills if high standards were to be reached. The lack of students in these subjects would also have an effect on the number of students opting for the subjects at University. The association concluded that as a consequence, this would create a lack of qualified teachers. A number of letters were written in the press during that scholastic year highlighting the importance of Home Economics and Needlework and their role in promoting the well-being of the family and society. Some also emphasised the importance of the subjects as to how they target the needs of the nation through the work done at Ordinary and Advanced levels and the degree course at University.

This was perhaps one of the strongest cases of lobbying by the subjects' association and the Education Officer in the history of the subjects in Malta. The members of the subjects' community unequivocally contested the government's policy. Such a collective contestation towards educational policies was uncommon at the time, and the authorities accepted to reconsider their plans. Although the education authorities argued that they wanted to provide similar curricula for all students irrespective of gender, in September 1983, the subjects were reintroduced for female students in the first two years at the junior lyceum on a rotation system. This was a clear case of refraction provoked by contestation, whereby the attempt to implement official policy as laid out according to a given model was halted by the objections of one of the stakeholders, resulting in a modification of the original policy according to the effective needs of the students, who were the end users of the policy, and also of the teachers who risked being negatively affected by it.

Only a couple of the participants who were teachers at the time briefly mentioned this issue, which had been a battle for the survival of the subjects. Understandably, the teachers viewed the main consequence of the removal of the subjects from the lower forms of the junior lyceum as a threat of redundancy from the school where they were

teaching at the time. In Malta, the issue of redundancy for a government employee means a transfer to another department. In this case, the education authorities can transfer a teacher from one school to another. At that time, a transfer could only be issued within the same education sector, that is, from a secondary to another secondary school or from a primary to another primary school. Therefore teachers had the redundancy issue in mind as well as the other issues mentioned by the association and the Education Officer.

#### **7.4 Home Economics education for boys**

In Malta, equal opportunities for both sexes took time to occur due to traditional and cultural factors common to Catholic Mediterranean communities. The changes that were brought about by the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 in Britain, which made it illegal to offer a school subject only to one gender in coeducational schooling, were felt much later in Malta. Although the Maltese Education Act of 1974 brought about several changes to the education system, no significant changes were made with respect to the creation of a more gender free curriculum in schools.

##### **7.4.1 Establishing Home Economics for boys**

The NMC Regulations of 1990 established by the Education Act of 1988 ensured equal opportunities for boys and girls. The secondary level curriculum ensured that both sexes had the opportunity for similar core subjects and option choices. Consequently, it was legally established that boys could choose Home Economics and Needlework. For the second time, instead of making the subjects available also for boys, the authorities deemed appropriate to remove the subjects altogether from the secondary school curriculum for the first two years. As a result, this policy had negative consequences on Home Economics teachers, as several of them became redundant. Most opted to teach other subjects, especially the newly-introduced PSE later called PSD.<sup>32</sup>

It was only in 1992 that Maltese boys attending some of the government secondary schools were given the opportunity to choose Home Economics as an option in Form

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<sup>32</sup> In 2014, the scope of the subject was broadened and was renamed 'Personal, Social and Career Development' (PSCD).



III (see Chapter 3).<sup>33</sup> No particular changes were made to the subject's curriculum although the teachers strove to deliver lessons that were as gender-neutral as they possibly could in order to provide a positive experience for their students. Since then, Home Economics has been also offered as an option in Year 6 to those students who wished to opt for it in Form I.<sup>34</sup> This was a positive move by the education authorities towards the creation of a gender neutral curriculum in state schools. Some teachers were not expecting such a positive move, possibly due to the low status of the subject and the perception of many who believed that it was suitable only for females.

We never thought that our subjects could ever be offered to boys. This was a big success. It was all due to the Education Officer and Subject Coordinators who worked so hard to accomplish all this. It was a big achievement for the country. I had never dreamt that Home Economics could ever be taught to boys! [Kennedia, LHi]

The success obtained by the subject in the state and the co-ed independent schools was such that, by June 2014, Home Economics had been introduced in all boys' church schools, except for three (Bartolo, 2014 [email]). The boys' church schools that were reluctant to offer the subject to their male students had several reasons for not doing so. For instance, time-tabling issues were one of the problems for not including Home Economics, although this could have been resolved if the subject was offered as one of the option choices for students as is current practice in other boys' church schools. Lack of physical space and financial resources to build and equip a food laboratory was another difficulty encountered by these schools. In some institutions, there already existed a fully equipped food laboratory which is used by D&T teachers. In most schools, it is usual practice that both Home Economics and D&T teachers use the same food laboratory. Another reason for not offering Home Economics was that the

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<sup>33</sup> In Britain, boys could follow courses in related fields, cookery and other domestic subjects, for over hundred years (Wynn, 1983). However, from 1975, schools were legally bound to offer Home Economics and Textile Studies (the term used before its abolition from the British national curriculum), to boys. In other countries, such as Hong Kong, also a British colony, schools could offer Home Economics to boys in the late 1970s (Yung Chan, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> After the NCF was launched in 2013, Home Economics along with other subjects, was removed as an option for Form I students attending state secondary schools as from scholastic year 2014/15. Instead, it was amalgamated with Physical Education (PE) to create a new subject, Physical and Health Education (PHE) which had to be delivered to all students in middle and senior state schools (DCM 58/14). By September 2014, PHE became a learning area with the result that PE and Home Economics became two separate subjects. The number of lessons and the syllabi remained unchanged.

school authorities still perceived Home Economics as a subject mostly suitable for females, irrelevant whether it has some career prospects suitable also for male students.

The popularity of the subject in male state secondary schools is evident from the number of students opting for it. For instance, after eight years since Home Economics was introduced in state secondary schools, during the scholastic year 2000-2001, the subject was studied by 895 male students in ten boys' schools around Malta and Gozo (Borg and Fenech, 2001). Moreover, the popularity of the subject among male students is apparent from the number of candidates sitting for the SEC level examination over the past decade, 2001-2010, as can be seen from Table 7.1. This Table also shows the popularity of the subjects in girls' Church and co-ed independent schools when compared to the boys' schools. The late introduction of Home Economics in boys' Church schools is evident from the negligible number of candidates taking the examination. By 2010, however, Home Economics was gaining popularity among boys in these schools. In more recent years, although the subject is still generally more popular with girls, by 2013 half the candidates sitting for the SEC level examination were males (MATSEC Statistical Reports, 2013).

As mentioned in Chapter 6, the vocational aspect of Home Economics has always been one of the main reasons boys opt for it. As Home Economics is a preferred subject for entry into ITS, boys perceive its utilitarian value in order to pursue their preferred career in the hospitality industry (Zahra, 1996). This situation is not unique to Malta, as the vocational aspect of Home Economics also attracts male students in other countries, such as Australia, where Pendergast found that students select the subject for its practical component. Girls perceive it as a means to improve their life skills, while boys aspire for paid work in catering (Pendergast, 2001).

YEAR	GENDER	SCHOOLS				TOTAL
		STATE SCHOOLS	CHURCH SCHOOLS	INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS	PRIVATE CANDIDATES	
2001	Boys	93	0	12	1	106
	Girls	288	55	9	25	377
2002	Boys	140	0	8	7	155
	Girls	296	44	8	23	371
2003	Boys	155	2	8	6	171
	Girls	307	64	13	31	415
2004	Boys	126	1	10	8	145
	Girls	350	58	21	14	443
2005	Boys	165	1	12	15	193
	Girls	399	93	16	13	521
2006	Boys	201	0	14	4	219
	Girls	384	86	31	20	524
2007	Boys	195	1	12	5	203
	Girls	372	114	30	13	529
2008	Boys	189	0	11	7	207
	Girls	411	116	19	11	557
2009	Boys	171	0	19	10	200
	Girls	454	116	18	16	604
2010	Boys	251	9	17	7	284
	Girls	431	110	23	17	581

**Table 7.1:** Number of male and female candidates sitting for the SEC Examination in Home Economics (Source: MATSEC Newsletters Nos. 41- 53; MATSEC Statistical Reports, 2001-2010).

However, there are male students who believe that Home Economics is an easy subject (Zahra, 1996), a soft option, or a girls' subject. Some even believe that it is suited for the low ability students. One of the participants of this study who was in her late forties at the time, discussed this issue and even mentioned her own personal experience:

When Home Economics became available for boys we experienced a leap in status. However, after nearly 20 years, there are some boys' schools that still consider Home Economics as a Cinderella subject. I have a nephew who is a bright boy and chose the subject in Form I. One day he asked me whether Home Economics was chosen only by the weakest students. He felt uneasy telling others that he studied Home Economics.

This is the situation and we have to face it.

When Home Economics was introduced at ITS, people started appreciating its value, not just its usefulness in everyday life. Often, parents tell me that they would like their children to choose the subject because it is useful in life. When ITS started, people started looking at the subject from a different perspective. I could see it. [Marigold, LHi]

People's perception towards the subject is still focused on the fact that historically it was a girls' subject, and this identity has shaped its content and its pedagogies. Some still claim that Home Economics is the 'most traditional feminine subject' in the school curriculum (Attar, 1990, p. 2). Guidance and counselling services in schools play a significant role in influencing more female students to opt for the subject more than they do to males (Mears and Haynes-Clements, 1983). As it is difficult to give a clear definition of the subject, many remain attached to the traditional view that Home Economics is related to the female domain and is suitable for low ability students.<sup>35</sup>

As was the case in Britain through the 1980s (Attar, 1990) and in Australia in the 1990s (Pendergast, 2001), in Malta very few boys usually opt for Home Economics at secondary school in order to gain qualifications that would lead them to a specific career path other than the ITS courses in hospitality. In the fourteen years I taught Home Economics at post-secondary institutions, the number of boys choosing the subject was always extremely low. This is reflected in the number of male candidates sitting for Intermediate and Advanced level examinations in Home Economics and Human Ecology from 2001 to 2010 (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 shows the overall low number of candidates taking the examination at the three state Sixth Forms found in Malta and Gozo. The issue of small numbers is mainly due to the choice of subject groups available at these institutions. The university entry requirements categorise all available academic subjects into four groups. Students must choose at least one subject from each of the first three groups, whereas it is not compulsory to choose a subject from Group 4. Home Economics and Human Ecology is included in Group 4 alongside others such as D&T, Art, PE, Computing, and Engineering Drawing (The Malta University Junior College, 2013).

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<sup>35</sup> Further discussion on the definition of Home Economics is discussed in a section related to name change in Chapter 8.

In her research on the British situation, Attar (1990) found similar trends in the number of males taking the subject at Advanced level. A male participant in this study made the following comment about his decision to choose Home Economics at Sixth Form:

My former Junior Lyceum mates were really surprised that I chose Home Economics as one of my Advanced level subjects. In previous years, they had really admired those who opted for Home Economics. But now their perception changed drastically. Home Economics students were no longer looked up to. My friends asked me: “Do you know what you are doing? Do you know that you are narrowing your career options?” I replied that this was my decision as I wanted to become a Home Economics teacher [Robert, SSi].

YEAR	GENDER	LEVEL			
		INTERMEDIATE		ADVANCED	
			TOTAL		TOTAL
2001	Males		*	**	70
	Females			**	
2002	Males		*	2	54
	Females			52	
2003	Males	5	18	2	60
	Females	13		58	
2004	Males	8	30	7	65
	Females	22		58	
2005	Males	3	41	8	100
	Females	38		92	
2006	Males	6	49	7	80
	Females	43		73	
2007	Males	6	43	7	89
	Females	37		82	
2008	Males	9	56	10	98
	Females	47		88	
2009	Males	5	40	8	106
	Females	35		98	
2010	Males	4	54	8	103
	Females	50		95	

\* Home Economics and Human Ecology at Intermediate level was offered for the first time in 2003.

\*\*No figures were available for male and female candidates.

**Table 7.2:** The number of male and female candidates sitting for Intermediate and Advanced level examinations in Home Economics and Human Ecology (Source: MATSEC Newsletters Nos. 41- 53; MATSEC Statistical Reports, 2001-2010).

Robert’s comment shows that the change in perception of male students towards those who chose Home Economics follows closely Layton’s model. Layton (1972) argued

that initially students are attracted towards a new subject by its practical utility. Then students perceive the value of studying the subject. Later, when the subject gets well established in the curriculum, it loses its lustre and attraction. Although Home Economics was not a new subject, it was a novelty when it was introduced in boys' schools. Many students found it beneficial to opt for the subject as it facilitated their pursuit of a future career in hospitality. After some years, some students lost interest in the subject and started looking down upon those who chose it at post-secondary level. Although students could still opt to proceed to ITS from Sixth Form, the value and significance of following a course in Home Economics at this level was seen as restricting career choices to hospitality or teaching.

When I was teaching Home Economics at post-secondary level, I regularly had one or two male students in my groups. The low number of males opting for Home Economics at this level was also highlighted by Pendergast (2001) with reference to Australia. Most Maltese male students of Home Economics were interested in pursuing their studies in catering, while others intended to follow degree courses at University in psychology, social care or education. Since 2001, only six male students obtained a Bachelor of Education degree in Home Economics. Three of them were mature students and had previously studied at ITS before reading for a degree in Home Economics. The others had obtained their Advanced level qualifications in the subject and wanted to pursue a career in teaching. A participant who read a B.Ed. (Hons.) degree at University made the following comment:

Since secondary school, I was always determined to become a Home Economics teacher. That was my aim and I wanted to teach boys. My teacher who taught me in Form I used to encourage me to go to ITS as I was good at the subject. I never dreamt of going to ITS. I did not want to continue my studies there. My wish was to become a Home Economics teacher [David, SSI].

From my personal experience, the males who study Home Economics at University are usually very keen to teach the subject to male students, especially if they studied the subject since secondary school. The experience they gain throughout secondary schooling, Sixth Form or ITS is one of the motivating factors that drives them to choose teaching Home Economics as a profession. I personally recall two such

students who were extremely eager to follow the Home Economics course at University despite struggling to get all the necessary entry requirements.

One of the male Home Economics graduates described his experience during his two years at Sixth Form as follows:

There were two Home Economics groups following the A level course and there were two boys in each group. My friend, a former secondary schoolmate, was in my group. I always felt like a king among all those girls [laughs] during the Home Economics lessons. Our teacher tried her best to include us in the discussion of topics more related to females [...] However I would still have preferred if my friend and I were with the boys of the other group [Robert, SSi].

The males studying Home Economics at Advanced level at Sixth Form were of two types; the ones who felt isolated because they were outnumbered by their female counterparts and those who attracted all the attention and blended well with the rest of the group. Robert was one of the latter type of students. His final concluding comment may indicate that somehow boys still preferred the presence of other boys during Home Economics lessons.

#### **7.4.2 The first male Home Economics teachers in Malta**

It is often the case that many Home Economics female teachers tend to receive comments from other people, even other teachers, that their subject is related only to cooking. Many participants mentioned this issue and expressed their frustration when they were referred to as ‘cooks’. They find themselves in a situation where they need to explain that ‘Home Economics is not just cooking’. This is also often experienced by home economists abroad (Anderson Darling, 1995). Some of the female respondents of this study were very emotional when we were discussing this issue.<sup>36</sup> The male participants were also irritated when others belittled their subject. One felt that the only time he felt discriminated because he was studying Home Economics was at University:

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<sup>36</sup> In the past, it was common practice for head teachers to ask the Home Economics teachers to be the caterers for school events such as Prize Days. Some teachers were not always willing to miss lessons in order to prepare the food required. Many participants lamented of the time that was wasted preparing and serving food during such events. In recent years, this practice was stopped as many schools now engage outside caterers.

Once, during a lecture, the professor told us, “Oh! You are the Home Economics students who know how to fry an egg.” I do not accept such a comment. I reacted immediately and spoke on behalf of the others. I told him, “When you were an English teacher did you just teach the verbs?” He just kept silent [Robert, SSi].

Even other male participants stated that when they were studying the subject at secondary school or at Sixth Form, they used to get some negative comments about being Home Economics students. However, when they were then employed as teachers, they never felt that others devalued their work and were never referred to as ‘cooks’. One of the reasons why female Home Economics teachers are more prone to receiving such comments than males, is the highly gendered nature of the subject, due to its past as an exclusively female domain.

Several of the participants of this study reflected on their teaching experience. For instance, Robert's experience during teaching practice in a girls' school was a positive one:

I was always very respected by the staff. The main reason was because I was a male Home Economics teacher. To a certain extent, maybe for social reasons, Home Economics is considered a girls' subject [...]. Both the students and the Home Economics teachers [all females] showed me great respect. I was really pampered [Robert, SSi].

One may argue that Robert was ‘pampered’ by female teachers and students for a number of reasons, especially because of the novelty of having a male Home Economics teacher in this particular girls' school, which could have triggered the ‘mother figure’ and caring attitudes towards males in the female teachers. It was a new experience for the female Home Economics teachers to have a male colleague, hence their behaviour in such a situation. On the students' part, having a male teaching a subject that was well-known to be highly gendered, prompted a particular behaviour. It has to be noted that Robert was young at the time, which could also be one of the reasons for the teachers and the students' behaviour towards him. Pendergast (2001) provided a detailed account of the behaviour of a male Home Economics teacher who was quite popular with his students. Although physical appearance was not an influential factor in the positive attitudes of the students towards the teacher, his skills and character were what was mostly valued. Taking on Pendergast's findings, in Robert's case, one could also infer that his experience was a positive one for the



students because they liked his way of teaching. Moreover, the Headmaster was so pleased that there was a male Home Economics student-teacher in his school that he wanted to keep him on to teach full-time on completion of his degree.

Male Home Economics teachers could be ‘positive role models’ for boys in secondary schools. According to Pendergast (2001, p. 48), this could trigger a ‘circular legitimization strategy’ where more boys would opt to study the subject, thus improving its image and status. This, she argued, could further entice males to choose Home Economics at post-secondary level. Being a good role model for male students was an issue that was raised by one of the male participants in this study:

Students regularly ask me, “But how can we become Home Economics teachers from a secondary school?”<sup>37</sup> I tell them that if they concentrate on their studies, they will achieve their aim. When I tell them that I also attended a secondary school when I was in Form I, they get encouraged. They see me as a good role model for them [David, SSi].

Being a Home Economics teacher in an all boys’ school has an added advantage. Students of both sexes tend to trust Home Economics teachers and many also consider them as friends. This was pointed out by one of the male participants:

Male students are different. Once they realise that you are as good as a female teacher, they start trusting you. They [male students] told me that I was like a father to them as they could express things much better than with the female teachers. The male perception is different [...] When I am teaching certain topics, such as family, drugs, smoking [...] my male students tend to share a lot of personal experiences. They feel more comfortable with me than with females [Kieran, SSi].

The male teacher could be instrumental in influencing the perceptions of parents and students with respect to the careers related to the subject. David described the following situation:

The first time I entered the classroom, the students were really pleased that I was a male Home Economics teacher. Students still believe that Home Economics leads you only to ITS. That is the only thing the students focus on. During the ‘option talks’, parents are still of that idea that their children can work in a hotel if they choose Home Economics. I always try to help

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<sup>37</sup> At the time of the interview, secondary schools catered for those students who had either failed their 11+ examination or decided not to sit for it.

them understand that a career in catering is not the only path that their children can take. Unfortunately, the parents' perception is still much focused on the hospitality industry [David, SSi].

Many parents and students are still in the dark about the career prospects related to Home Economics. In Malta, the long standing tradition that the subject is specifically oriented towards the domestic domain and to females, restricted career openings. The lack of proper promotional activities by the Home Economics community for the various careers related to the subject, have contributed to the problem. As seen from the interviews with male respondents, the majority of the male students who study Home Economics choose the subject in order to pursue a career in catering. During a recent seminar for Home Economics teachers in church secondary schools, teachers unanimously agreed that boys opted for the subject with the sole intention of following courses at ITS.

From another perspective, having a male Home Economics teacher in an all girls' school was found to trigger a different reaction:

During the first lesson I had with Form I students, they were surprised that I was going to teach them Home Economics. They thought that I was replacing a teacher who was absent. So when I told them to write down what they would be needing for their Home Economics lessons, they were astonished. They thought that men could not teach Home Economics. It was a very big surprise for them that there were male Home Economics teachers too. They were aware that Home Economics was an option for boys, but not that males could specialise in the subject and get a teaching degree [Robert, SSi].

Other two male participants compared the perspectives of both female and male students as they perceived them during their teaching practice experience:

The girls had no problem to accept me as a male Home Economics teacher. The boys appreciated it more, as you can do more practicals with the boys and they do get more involved. The girls were more relaxed [...] they were a bit shy too. So they kept back from asking any questions [Adam, SSi].

When I was teaching girls, I used to feel that the lesson was conducted at a quicker pace than with boys. Girls used to talk more among themselves and I had to raise my voice. The boys are different as I never needed to raise my voice so much. In fact, the first time I went into a class of boys,

the students told me, “Please Sir, you do not need to raise your voice so much.” [Kieran, SSi].

The attitudes of boys towards the subject was highlighted in the study conducted by Attar (1990) and Zahra (1996). During her observations, Attar found that British boys tend to show enthusiasm, enjoy Home Economics lessons and gain praise from their teachers more than girls. She noted that ‘the most striking feature, absent from description of teaching home economics to girls, is the enjoyment which both teachers and pupils express’ (p. 133). This account is similar to that of Zahra, who conducted research amongst Home Economics teachers and students of both sexes in Maltese secondary schools. She found that female teachers preferred to teach boys rather than girls, as boys participated actively and gave them positive feedback about their lessons. This compares well with the work conducted by Measor (1983) on gender and the curriculum. In her study, when boys and girls were offered compulsory Domestic Science and Needlework, the boys were more reluctant to study a ‘feminine’ subject. As a result they were disruptive and it was very difficult for the teacher to gain control of the class. The boys’ attitudes towards Domestic Science was slightly different from that towards Needlework, as they felt that the former had better career prospects (Measor, 1983; 1984). Attar attributed the enthusiasm of boys during Home Economics lessons to the fact that they are not led to learn something to be of service to others, as girls are expected to do, except in the case of specifically-related careers.

### **7.4.3 Gender-orientation of male students and teachers**

The gender-orientation of males studying or teaching Home Economics is sometimes put into question. This issue had been discussed in Britain as early as 1971 (Attar, 1990) and also recently by Elias (2008). The ‘cross sex-role boundaries’ in Home Economics tend to label males as being effeminate or gay (Attar, 1990, p.120). The issue of homosexuality in relation to Home Economics was also mentioned in this study by three participants. Two female teachers who shared their perspectives on their male students, and that of a male teacher in a boys’ secondary school.

The female Sixth Form teacher noted: <sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> There are only mixed-gender Sixth Forms available in Malta.

I think that some of the males choosing the subject at this level are likely to have homosexual tendencies. I have been noticing this trend for a number of years [Camellia, LHi].

During my personal teaching experience at post-secondary level, I also encountered male students who had an evident homosexual orientation.

A female secondary school teacher, who had been teaching Home Economics to male students for more than fifteen years stated:

Over the years I have seen many students with homosexual tendencies in our school. However they tend to be careful about their option choices. I think that they would not opt for Home Economics because they do not want to get noticed as being gay. I know that the guidance teacher talks to these students, but I am not sure whether they are influenced on whether to opt for Home Economics or not. In every group that I teach, there is always one at least with such tendencies [Lucy, HE FGd].

Her comment highlights the issue that Home Economics is still perceived by many as being a gendered subject, even more so in boys' schools. Presumably, some gay students could be bullied or challenged if they chose to study Home Economics. Homophobia among students is more evident in a single sex, all-male school (Maher, 2013). Opting for the subject at secondary level would make their homosexual tendencies even more evident and this can be a problem for those who are not willing to come out. From my experience teaching at post-secondary level for many years, students at this level are usually more tolerant towards people from different backgrounds and sexual orientation. In post-secondary institutions, most male students coming from single-sex schools are more likely to be interested in the opposite gender rather than in homophobic bullying (Maher, 2013).

Although the Maltese Home Economics curriculum was modified substantially over the years in order to remove any gender stereotyping, many still have the impression that it is specifically tailored for the traditional gender role of women inside the home. The negative perceptions of males towards homosexuality '[...] tend to be related to strongly rigid perceptions of appropriate gender roles' (Maher, 2013, p. 273). The stigma that male Home Economics teachers sometimes encounter during their professional career is a fairly new concept for the Maltese Home Economics community, as male students have only been studying the subject since 1992 and the

first male graduated from University in 2001.<sup>39</sup> Although, Maltese societal perceptions towards homosexuality have changed over the years, so far little is known about teachers' perceptions towards homosexuality (Council of Europe, 2005).

### **7.5 Subject options and gender discrimination**

During the 1960s, the channeling of students to their respective stereotype roles was evident from the subjects offered at the boys' and girls' secondary technical schools, the girls' grammar schools and the boys' lyceum. Among the subjects taught to boys at the Secondary Technical School were Art (Pottery and Handwork), Technical Drawing, Woodwork and Metalwork, besides Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Agricultural Science. On their part, female students at Maria Assumpta Secondary Technical School were offered Housecraft, Cookery, Needlework, Book-keeping, Shorthand and Typewriting. The choice of subjects offered to both sexes was also different in the more academically-oriented schools. The subjects offered to students admitted to the first year (Form I) at the girls' grammar schools and the lyceum can be seen in Table 7.3.

Apart from the inclusion of Housecraft and Needlework for female students, the number of lessons offered to the students in some of the subjects was also different. During the late 1960s, the Department of Education made several changes to the options offered at the girls' grammar schools and the Boys' Lyceum. Most changes were made to the combination of options rather through the introduction of new subjects.

Mortimer, the Assistant Director of Education, repeatedly spoke in favour of girls studying Housecraft and Needlework. This was due to the feedback provided by the headmistresses of several girls' grammar schools. One such comment received by Ms. Mortimer stated that 'The study of Domestic Subjects is indispensable in a girls' school and one subject must be compulsory throughout the course' (Head of Maria Regina Grammar School to Ass. Director of Education, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1964, DEdF, No. 429/63).

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<sup>39</sup> The male Home Economics graduate teacher never practiced as he took up a different career. After eight years, in 2008, there were two male graduates in the subject who continued in the teaching profession.

	<b>Girls' Grammar School</b>	<b>Boys' Lyceum</b>
Basic Subjects	Religion (3*) English Language and Literature (7) Maltese (2) French/Italian (4) Mathematics (6) Physical Education/Music (1)	Religion (3) English Language and Literature (8) Maltese (2) French/Italian (4) Mathematics (5) Physical Education (1)
Subjects out of which a choice is made in Form II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History (2)</li> <li>• Geography (2)</li> <li>• General Science (2)</li> <li>• Art (2)</li> <li>• Housecraft (2)</li> <li>• Needlework (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History (3)</li> <li>• Geography (3)</li> <li>• General Science (4)</li> <li>• Art/Music (2)</li> </ul> <p><i>Note: Latin to be offered as a subject choice in Form II</i></p>
* The numbers in brackets indicate the number of lessons per week		

**Table 7.3:** Choice of subjects in secondary and grammar schools for Form I in the Girls' Grammar Schools and the Boys' Lyceum for 1966-1967 (DEdF, No. 429/63).

A participant who at the time was one of the girls who opted for Housecraft at the Mdina Grammar School remarked:

A factor that influenced me to choose Housecraft was my family. [...] I was not good in sciences so Housecraft was my ideal subject. Eventually, in Form V, I sat for the GCE 'O' level in the subject and obtained a pass mark [Clover, LHi].

Another student who was attending a different grammar school at the time complained of her choice of subjects:

I chose Housecraft and Needlework at the Maria Regina Grammar School. Housecraft was not appealing for grammar school girls. I know that housekeeping topics were important for girls, but they were not stimulating enough for me. In fact, Housecraft was the only exam at GCE 'O' level which I failed [Lily, LHi].

## 7.6 Needlework - an option available only for girls

In spite of gender equality in the choice of subjects introduced by the NMC, Textiles Studies never was an attractive option in boys' secondary schools. The lack of interest in the subject among male students was due to various factors other than its image of

a female-oriented subject. As Needlework was one of the first domestic subjects to be taught to girls, this gave it a clear gender orientation. In Malta, the subject was never able to evolve and transform itself into an attractive and interesting subject, as was the case in other countries. In Britain, for instance, Needlework/Needlecraft was replaced with Textiles Technology in secondary schools and Fashion Design at tertiary institutions. This has removed the gender bias and provided broader career prospects for many students who wish to study the subject. Unfortunately, this shift never occurred in the Maltese educational system and the modifications made along the years to the Textiles Studies curriculum were never sufficient to create such a desirable transformation.

Some participants included in this study considered the introduction of Textiles Studies as an option for boys as an important issue, since the subject includes many aspects of fashion design. The vocational aspect of Textiles Studies was also highlighted as being a key factor in attracting male students to the subject. Male fashion designers were mentioned as being good role models as they could influence prospective students in studying the subject.

As everybody knows, the best fashion designers are males. So why is it such a problem to offer the subject to boys? We need to do more lobbying. I think that we need to make people more aware of the importance of the subject [Barbara, TS FGd].

If Textiles Studies were well promoted, it could compete well with other subject options that attract male students in their choice of subjects. I think it is very important to offer Textiles [Studies] to boys. Many famous designers and good Maltese dress-makers are males, so why cannot Maltese boys have the opportunity to study Textiles [Studies]? [Polly, TS FGd].

One participant mentioned the value of studying the subject, pointing out its practical usefulness:

Apart from possible job prospects, I consider Textiles Studies as an important practical subject as it gives students the opportunity to learn a skill which will last a lifetime. I believe that certain skills are useful for both sexes and our subject should also be taught to boys [Lucy, TS FGd].

Teacher training and the availability of Textiles Studies teachers were two issues mentioned by a number of participants as possible difficulties that hinder the introduction of the subject in boys' secondary schools:

One of the guidance teachers in my school spoke to me about offering Textiles Studies to boys. She seemed keen about this idea but nothing materialised. If we include the Textiles [Studies] in the list of subject options for boys, the total number of students will obviously increase. But on the other hand, do we have any young Textiles Studies teachers? Are we training new teachers? [Barbara, TS FGd].

At the moment, the urgent problem is the lack of Textiles Studies teachers. In the next scholastic year, for instance, there might be some girls' secondary schools that will not be offering the subject, as there are no teachers available. This could mean that for the next five years there will be no students studying Textiles [Studies] in those schools. So how can we make it available to boys if there are not enough teachers for girls? [Polly, TS FGd].

During the 1990s, Needlework/Needlecraft was only offered to boys depending on the availability of a Textiles Studies teacher, which the Education Directorate never seemed to have available. In 2010, at the time of data collection, there were about fourteen Textiles Studies teachers compared to about ninety teaching Home Economics in state schools. Four years later, in 2014, the number of Textiles Studies teachers increased slightly.<sup>40</sup> However, the shortage of Textiles Studies teachers was still considered to be a chronic problem. The main justification for not offering the subject to boys was related to logistical problems. These difficulties were partially overcome by the setting-up of Textile Technology laboratories used by D&T and Textiles Studies students in most schools. However boys were unable to choose Textiles Studies. A participant in the study (Cyclamen, LHi) stated that some years ago, an Assistant Head of a Boys' Secondary School requested a Textiles Studies teacher because a group of around 11 to 12 students had chosen the subject. However, no Textiles Studies teacher was available and the students were asked to choose another option. The Faculty of Education tried to ease the problem by encouraging Home Economics student-teachers to specialise in Textiles Studies by conducting part

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<sup>40</sup> There are nine teaching only Textiles Studies, and another seven who also teach Home Economics. Ninety-seven others only teach Home Economics (Fabri, 2014 [email]).



of their teaching practicum in the subject. By 2010, there were five Home Economics undergraduates who received training to teach both subjects. They graduated a year later and four of these students were posted in girls' schools to teach either subjects or Textiles Studies only. The unpopularity of Textiles Studies in boys' schools is evident from the statistics issued by MATSEC. From 2001 to 2010, no male candidates sat for the SEC examination in what is officially called T&D by the local examinations board (MATSEC Newsletters and Statistical Reports, 2001-2010).

A number of changes were brought about in secondary schools with the implementation of the NCF with respect to gender and equality (see Chapter 2). The introduction of co-education in all state schools in September 2014 brought about changes in option choices. Textiles Studies, along with other subjects, was no longer offered to these students going into Form I. Moreover, since the NCF provided a similar curriculum for all Form III students, common option choices were offered to all, without any gender discrimination. Consequently, from scholastic year 2014-15, boys interested to study Textiles Studies were technically able to opt for it. However, in a letter circular published by the Department of Curriculum Management, it was pointed out that Heads of secondary schools were to inform their students that certain subjects/options might not be available if they were not already offered in their school or if very few students applied for them (DCM 71/14). This was a setback for those boys who were interested in studying Textiles Studies, especially for those who had already been attending an all-boys secondary school. This means that Textiles Studies is one of the very few subjects, if not the only one, that will not be available as an option for boys, as so far the subject has never been taught in these schools. Whether a subject or an option is offered in a school is at the discretion of the Heads of School and the respective College Principals, irrespective of availability. Both teachers and students who opt for Textiles Studies stand to gain if school administrators decide to offer the subject.

### **7.7 Gender in the Home Economics/Textiles Studies curriculum**

For decades, the secondary school curriculum for domestic subjects was based on the British Oxford GCE Ordinary level syllabus for Cookery, Housecraft and Needlework. Additional syllabi were designed for local schools by the subjects' Education Officers within the Department. These were also based on the British syllabi, as is evident from

the topics and the examination questions set for the secondary school examinations from the 1960s until the late 1980s. As discussed in Chapter 3, the textbooks used were imported mostly from Britain and the US, as no local textbooks on the subjects have ever been published.<sup>41</sup> Researchers in various countries analysed sexism in Home Economics textbooks (see for instance, Turnbull, 1980; Wynn, 1983; Attar, 1987; Portelli, 1996). Prior to the British Sex Discrimination Act, the differentiated role of males and females was evident in most of these books, and it has been claimed that sex-stereotyping in textbooks has a negative impact on students (Measor and Sikes, 1992). After an examination of a selection of textbooks available in Maltese secondary schools from the 1960s to the 1970s which were used in Home Economics lessons, it was found, quite predictably, that most projected a lifestyle that was limited to the domestic domain with a focus on the traditional nuclear family with very little reference to alternative lifestyles. They mostly emphasised the role of women as that of housekeeper. Two textbooks frequently used in Maltese Home Economics secondary schools during the 1980s and 1990s, *About the House* (McGrath, 1980) and *All about Food* (McGrath, 1982), generally presented a non-sexist approach to the different gender roles within the family which were different from those illustrated in books published prior to 1975 (Portelli, 1996). However Wynn (1983) and Attar (1990) argued that some Home Economics books published after 1975 in Britain still showed evidence of gender bias. Textiles Studies textbooks used in Maltese schools followed a similar pattern to those in Home Economics. Most textbooks published prior to 1975 featured women and women's clothing (see for instance, *How You Look and Dress* (Carson, 1969)). Two very popular textbooks used in Maltese schools during the 1960s until the mid-1980s, *Needlework for Schools* (Neal, 1976) and *Introduction to Needlework* (Bull, 1971) included diagrams showing clothing for women and girls. However, illustrations used in books published after 1975, portray males alongside women in topics related to creative work, fashion, garment production and consumer education (see for instance, *Skills in Home Economic - Textiles*

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<sup>41</sup> Although several attempts have been made by undergraduate students to develop textbooks suitable for the Maltese scenario as part of their dissertation research, these were never published. To date, no Home Economics and Textiles Studies textbooks written for Maltese students have ever been published, neither in Maltese nor in English. Many Home Economics teachers argue that they prefer to keep abreast with the latest developments in their field, so they prefer to write their own notes and pass them on to their students in class through handouts.

(Ridgwell and Davies, 1989) and *Home Economics in Action - Textiles* (Christian-Carter and Crabtree, 1988).

The rationale for the Home Economics and Needlework/Needlecraft/Textiles Studies syllabi designed for Maltese schools in the 1970s and later, did not make specific reference to females, contrary to those set for the 1960s. Drastic changes occurred in the 1990s when there was a shift from a family-oriented approach to one that is highly vocational (Portelli, 1996). This move was in line with the introduction of Home Economics for boys during the same period. The SEC Home Economics syllabus for 1994 stated specifically that it was designed for both males and females, with a content focusing slightly less on developing homemaking skills 'to one oriented to becoming the basis for further studies in the area related to Home Economics' (MATSEC Examinations Board, 1992, p. 151). The vocational aspect was introduced for students sitting for the May 1995 session. This aspect was emphasised especially in the coursework component, rather than in the actual syllabus content. The coursework included a project and an investigation related to one of the following option areas: Food preparation and Technology, Hospitality Services, Child Care (later renamed Child Development) and Care of the Elderly. These areas provided an opportunity for students to prepare themselves to further their studies in specific careers (Portelli, 1996).

When this new approach was introduced in the SEC syllabus, I was teaching at the Higher Secondary School. The syllabus was relatively gender neutral and it was designed in such a way as to exclude any sort of bias towards any particular sex. As a teacher preparing students for SEC, I did not encounter any problems in interpreting and delivering the content in a gender-unbiased way. At the time, a number of male students were enrolled for Home Economics SEC and Advanced classes. However, topics such as child development required particular attention, as it was important to ensure the inclusion of the role of the father in the picture. The above-mentioned Home Economics SEC syllabus, excluded topics related to housekeeping in order to cater for everyone. In later versions of the syllabi, the approach taken by the 1992 SEC syllabus was further developed by refining the content topics and the options areas focusing on careers suitable for both genders (MATSEC Examinations Board, 2000a). The Home Economics state school syllabus followed a similar approach to that taken

by SEC. In 1981, a number of amendments were carried out to the secondary school syllabus; some topics related to housekeeping and practical laundry work were left out, in order to create a syllabus suitable for both sexes. Over the years, many topics related to acquisition of culinary skills were reduced and given less importance, due to the introduction of the coursework component. This also was the case in the late 1980s in Britain (Attar, 1990). The practical component of the subject in Maltese schools was a very important element for the boys who opted for Home Economics, since they aspired for careers in the hospitality industry. However, in spite of this change, most boys still opted for the subject, at SEC level (see Table 7.1).

The establishment of D&T in the Maltese curriculum was strongly influenced by what was happening in Britain in the late 1980s, where it had been argued that the main reason for the inclusion of food and textiles as areas within the D&T curriculum was to make the subject appealing for girls (Attar, 1990; Paechter, 2000). In general, this view was not shared by the Maltese Home Economics and Textiles Studies community. Some claimed that this was a way how Textiles Studies could be introduced to boys, although many stakeholders doubted the benefits that would be eventually reaped by students when studying Textiles as part of D&T. Textiles, offered as an area within the D&T, included most of the subject content of Textiles Studies with some focus on the design process and technology.<sup>42</sup>

An analysis of examination papers may also provide an indication on whether school curricula are free from gender discrimination. Research showed that examination papers in many subjects tend to be biased against girls (Fawcett Society, 1987, cited in Measor and Sikes, 1992; Skelton and Francis, 2009). This is not the case for Home Economics and Textiles Studies (Wynn, 1983; Portelli, 1996). A short analysis of Maltese Secondary School examination papers in Home Economics from 1976 to 1993 indicated that these emphasised ‘the domestic slant and the way girls are immersed into parental roles associated with the female domain’ (Portelli, 1996, p. 108). It was also found that from 1990 onwards, the papers set by the Education Directorate, were generally free from any gender bias. MATSEC and the Education Directorate strive

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<sup>42</sup> Food, resistant materials and electronics were the other areas included in the Maltese syllabus for D&T.

to maintain examination papers and any other form of assessment free from any gender bias (Educational Assessment Unit, 2006; MATSEC Examinations Board, 2007).

The NMC of 1999, together with the Equality for Men and Women Act (2003), brought about the improvement in the equality status between men and women. It was inevitable for Malta to follow the trend that was gaining ground in other Western countries which aimed to abolish gender discrimination. The present Maltese education system endeavours to promote equality. According to the NMC, 'The educational community must ensure equality of access to the educational system without discrimination on the grounds of ability, gender, religion, race or socio-cultural and economic background' (Ministry of Education, 1999). One of the NMC principles was to promote gender equality by requiring students of both sexes to follow the same curriculum, and to ensure equal access to similar job opportunities and educational experiences. The choice of school subjects was a predominant feature, and the NMC emphasised that boys and girls should have a clear understanding of what the different subjects entail, especially those subjects that 'are stereotypically associated with one gender or another' (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 39). The document also highlighted the need for students to make informed choices about these subjects and the career prospects associated with them. The Home Economics and Textiles Studies syllabi that were designed henceforth sought to eliminate areas which previously fostered specific gender identities and highlighted career opportunities related to the fields of study. More recently, the final version of the NCF document implemented in schools in September 2013 mentioned the criticism received by the first draft of the document itself for its limited reference to gender issues (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012). Gender was included in one of the cross curricular themes, education for diversity, which emphasised the value of tolerance towards others. The previous NMC was more instrumental in introducing and implementing gender equality across all subjects in the Maltese curriculum. This follows the general trend, as in many countries, except cases such as Sweden and South Africa, gender equality is hardly ever explicitly tackled in National Curricula (Paechter, 2007).

## **7.8 Conclusion**

Home Economics is not gender-exclusive but gender-intensive, in that the vast majority of students and teachers belong to the same gender (Thompson, 1995). This

is historically evident in many Home Economics curricula of various countries, including Malta. In her study, Yung Chan (2005) found that an effective way of reducing the 'long-standing stereotyped image' of Home Economics is making the subject compulsory for all students (p. 182). This proved impossible to achieve in the case of Malta. When Home Economics and Textiles Studies became compulsory, they were only offered to girls in the secondary schools, and recent attempts to make the subjects compulsory for new entrants in the secondary schools failed, due to the subjects being withdrawn from the options offered. The view that Home Economics is a domestic-bound subject still persists, in spite of the fact that the subject has been available for male students for more than 20 years. Textiles Studies still lacks behind in this respect, and there are still many hurdles to overcome in order to attain gender equality. Changes in the curriculum must be necessarily linked to the socio-cultural changes that take place in the community at large. The significant changes in the way Maltese society perceives the role of women and other gender issues have had an impact especially on Home Economics and its relevance both in the school curriculum and as a career path for young people entering the workforce.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **NAME CHANGE AND THE REDEFINITION OF IDENTITY**

#### **8.0 Introduction**

This chapter analyses the attempts made over the years to redefine domestic subjects within the school curriculum. In most cases, such attempts were accompanied by a change in the subjects' name, and were due to foreign and local factors of influence. Special attention is given to the debates that took place within the subjects' community on these issues and on the outcomes of the changes carried out.

#### **8.1 From Housecraft to Home Economics**

As already stated in Chapter 3, 'Housecraft' was the preferred name given to the discipline prior to the 1960s, although 'Domestic Science' was used interchangeably. These names adequately reflected the subject's identity as a field dealing with skills related to the domestic sphere, but also highlighted the scientific basis of these skills. The name 'Home Economics' appeared in official records for the first time in 1965 (RwDE 1965), but archival research revealed that in most of the Education Department's official correspondence, administrators continued to use the name 'Housecraft' for many years, probably out of habit. 'Home Economics' was the name used in Britain at the time, so it is highly probable that the adoption of the new name in Malta reflected the need to assert that the subject in the Maltese curriculum corresponded to the one in the British education system. This occurred just after Malta's independence, at a time when the local authorities were no longer bound to the British system, but still felt the need to refer to it as a model to follow. By the time of the introduction of secondary education for all in 1970, the name 'Housecraft' had disappeared from official correspondence and from the secondary school curriculum (see for instance, RwDE 1970; DEdF, No. 400/72).

At tertiary level, the subject's name experienced similar changes. In 1960, when the subject was first introduced at Mater Admirabilis Training College for Women Teachers, it was to be called 'Domestic Science', in accordance with common practice at the teacher training colleges in Britain (Curmi, n.d., Appendix). However, the College opted for the name 'Housecraft' when it offered the subject as an area of specialisation (Curmi, n.d.) (see Appendix 14 - Sample of a Mater Admirabilis

Training College certificate). At the beginning of the 1970s, the name changed to 'Home Economics' in accordance with the change at secondary level.

When the Faculty of Education was established at the New University in 1978, the areas of specialisation in the degree course in teaching related to domestic subjects were called 'Home Economics/Food and Nutrition' and 'Home Economics/Dress and Fabric'. This followed the name of the Advanced level subjects offered by the University of Oxford Delegacy of Examinations published in 1971 (see Table 3.2). For many years, the Faculty followed the nomenclature used by the Oxford examinations board. In time, however, slight modifications were made to the subjects' names. For instance, in 1987, 'Home Economics', and 'Textiles and Fabric Design', were the names used for the subjects in the *Faculty of Education Prospectus* (University of Malta, 1987).

The influential contribution of university scholars towards defining a discipline, as highlighted by Goodson (1983), was an important factor in the issue of name change of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta. By the mid-1990s, Home Economics academic staff felt the need to find another appropriate name for the course offered at undergraduate level, because they believed that name change would identify better the subject knowledge and the skills they provide at tertiary level (NFCS Archives, Memo, 12<sup>th</sup> February 1996). However, no initiative was taken. In the following years, an increase in the number of full- and part-time Home Economics lecturers gave new impetus to the search for a new name for the discipline.

## **8.2 What's in a name?**

A lengthy discussion on a possible name change for Home Economics began in July 2004 and ended at a meeting held for lecturers in February 2006. Four key questions arose from the discussion during the first meeting:

Why do we feel a name change is necessary?

How will a name change be of benefit to the B.Ed. (Hons) Home Economics course, to the Home Economics professional body and to the Home Economics discipline across all levels of schooling?

Should the name change be a process implemented across all levels of schooling? That is, striving to have a common name at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary level?



Whether or not a new name is decided upon, what strategies could be implemented to promote Home Economics amongst parents of potential Home Economics pupils and potential or continuing Home Economics pupils themselves? (NFCS Correspondence, Home Economics coordinator to the Education Officer, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2004).

During the two-year period, several discussions with the subject's Education Officer took place, and the issue was also discussed at HEiA meetings. The members of the Home Economics community held different views on the issue. At the meeting held in February 2006, a majority of members voted for a name change (NFCS Correspondence, February 2006). Some of those who were against the proposal argued that:

The name Home Economics has become firmly associated with the different programmes offered by the Home Economics Seminar Centre especially among primary school children. If a name change is considered, perhaps the name Home Economics could be retained where work related to the Primary sector is concerned.

Currently many boys associate Home Economics with ITS and a career in hospitality. If we change the name, shall we be losing out on the strength of this association between Home Economics and ITS, and thus attract less boys to Home Economics? (NFCS Memo, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2006.)

I was personally involved in the discussion and I was among those who disagreed that the name should change. During my teaching experience at Sixth Form, the name 'Home Economics' rarely evoked negative perceptions. On the contrary, I was always respected as the subject's teacher and there were only very few instances when people showed me any disrespect due to my subject. On various occasions I was sought by colleagues, parents and students to give advice on issues related to health and well-being. The association of the name to the content was clear for those with whom I was in contact at the time. This could arguably have been due to the fact that I was teaching at post-secondary level.

It was agreed that the name should incorporate all the fields of knowledge that were part of the Home Economics programme. Some of the names proposed were 'Consumer and Nutrition Education'; 'Nutrition and Family Studies'; 'Health and Family Studies'; and 'Nutrition, Consumer and Family Studies'. Finally, another meeting was held in May 2006 where a plan of action on the issue was discussed and

an appropriate name was chosen, taking into consideration the length and acronym of the new name. Finally, 'Nutrition, Family and Consumer Studies' (NFCS) was deemed to be the most appropriate name that should be used instead of Home Economics.

In September 2006, Senate officially approved the new name, B.Ed. (Hons.) NFCS. Hence the new intake of undergraduate students enrolling in 2007 was to obtain their degree under the new name. The vision and principles for the subject, together with the content of the NFCS degree programme remained similar to those of previous years. The course content was still being revised continuously 'to meet changes in Home Economics and Textiles Studies-related syllabi, to provide training in innovative pedagogies, whilst also taking into consideration needs emerging from students' performance during teaching practice and feedback from our recent graduates and experienced Home Economics and Textiles Studies teachers' (NFCS Correspondence, 8<sup>th</sup> June 2007).

### **8.3 Rebranding or just a moniker?**

The name change at University did not filter down to other sectors of the education system. It was only at the University Junior College that the lectures felt that a change in name to their subject area would be appropriate, as students were being prepared for University. However, the name change for the University programme failed to coincide with a corresponding change in the Intermediate and Advanced level syllabi. The subjects at post-secondary level were still called 'Home Economics and Human Ecology' thus creating an anomaly that was rectified a few years later, when the subject's name reverted to 'Home Economics and Human Ecology' from 'NFCS'. According to one of the respondents of this study:

The issue of the change in the name of the Intermediate and Advanced level syllabi was discussed during [...] meetings held for the review of subject's syllabi, and it was decided that a letter should be written on behalf of the Syllabus Review Panel to the University Registrar, requesting a change in the name of Home Economics and Human Ecology. A letter has already been written to the MATSEC Board making the same request but nothing was done. When I later enquired about this letter, I was told that a change in name would only take place if there was a change in content. There was not a really big change in content but we needed to show that

there was. We have changed the orientation....but we still had to work on it [Sophie, SSi].

In addition, Home Economics at Secondary level still kept its original name and no attempt was made by officials at the Education Directorate to change it. During June and July 2008, HEiA conducted a survey among its members, the majority being Home Economics and Textiles Studies teachers serving in secondary schools. The results of the survey were important to determine the perception of its members regarding a name change for Home Economics in the Secondary and Post-secondary sectors. The results were very encouraging for the Association, as a huge majority of the members, 86%, were in favour of a change in name, with 87% agreeing that NFCS should be the name to be used at the targeted sectors (HEiA Newsletter, 2008). A participant who was also involved in the study conducted by HEiA argued:

There was an interest in having a name change. Not all were in favour of the name NFCS. I think they do find it a bit long, making it difficult to articulate the full name. They refer to the name Home Economics (in full). [...] They did not vote for a particular name at that point. This was carried out pretty close to when University made the name change [Sophie, SSi].

Based on the outcome of this survey, the HEiA Executive Committee forward their request to the education authorities, including the Director General Quality and Standards (HEiA Correspondence, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2008). In spite of the positive outcome of the survey in favour of a change in name, Secondary and Post-Secondary institutions kept the name as Home Economics, and Home Economics and Human Ecology respectively.

It is worthwhile to note that HEiA has been the only association in Malta, after the HENTA, to represent Home Economics and Textiles Studies teachers (see Diagram 3.2). In spite of the survey carried out among its members, whose majority were in favour of a change in name for their discipline, HEiA still kept the name 'Home Economics' in its title. Many of the participants interviewed for this study were members of HEiA and nobody mentioned a change in name for the Association. This is understandable, as it would have been inappropriate to have a subject's association bear a different name from the subject's name itself. Interestingly, the IFHE has kept its name in spite of the various names given to the discipline across the world.

#### 8.4 Different positions on a change in name

In the present study, the participants' opinions towards a change in the name for Home Economics were varied. Some were hesitant whether a new name would convey a clear message to others. One expressed her concerns as follows:

What worries me is that people already know what the subject entails [...]. On the other hand, I still find people who think that Home Economics is Cookery. If we change the name, we might push students away from the subject. I want the subject to increase in popularity, not move back. So you see, it is quite difficult to know exactly whether we should change the name, at least in secondary schools. The new name at University is relevant although I am worried that it is too long. The length of the name is a big issue and I don't think it will go down well with people. I really don't know [Marigold, LHi].

Other participants, mostly young teachers declared that a change in name was important for a number of reasons, especially for the image and status of the subject. Many people still foster a negative and stereotyped image of the subject, associating it with women and the home. Hence these young teachers believe that a more suitable name is needed instead of 'Home Economics' in order to remove this stigma. Most of them argued that often it is necessary to provide a definition or an explanation to describe better what the discipline entails. A male respondent said:

Nowadays things have changed and I think the name should change too. Our Maltese mentality was based on the fact that Home Economics was related to women. So with a change in name, it would no longer be the case. Nowadays the subject developed much more and I do not think that the link with women should be there. But there are still people who believe so [Adam, SSi].

Another male participant was of the opinion that the discipline should be given a new name:

I am all out for a change in the name for Home Economics. During my interview to become a teacher, I told the interviewing panel that I believed that a name change is extremely important for the subject. One of the members asked me, "Don't you think that the name is very long, NFCS?" I told her that I like the new name as it is modern and reflects the content. [David, SSi].

Even female participants expressed their agreement on a change in name. A female teacher in a boys' secondary school also highlighted the issue of the traditional stereotype image that the name tends to project.

I agree that the name should change. Although many students and parents are aware that the subject is no longer linked with the housewife and domestic work, there are still those who associate it with females and try to influence others about the link it has with the home [Starflower, HE FGd].

A more experienced participant argued that young Home Economics teachers were more inclined to go for a change in name:

The young teachers want to change the name for the sake of change. It is an adventure for them to have a change. An adventure for the newly qualified teacher without experience. Maybe they saw something negative, so they decided to have a change in name. It is a euphoric feeling, something new [Elderflower, LHi].

A couple of more experienced respondents, however, were of the same opinion as the young teachers. One of them described how the name had changed from 'Housecraft' to 'Home Economics', and is still of the opinion that the discipline requires a new name:

When it was called Housecraft, we changed it to Home Economics. It was a better word as we removed the emphasis on craft and the house. However with the name Home Economics, people gave a negative emphasis on the word home. I don't know why people think that home is a dirty word. To me, it is the most important place for the family. But strangely enough, the subject projects a certain [...] image.

I agree with the young Home Economics teachers that the name should be changed. When you talk to people of a certain age, maybe as old as I am [nearing retirement], and those who had studied it at school, they know what Home Economics is all about. But for younger people, who never learnt anything about the subject, it is difficult to know what the subject entails. [Myrtle, LHi].

I am delighted with the name change of the discipline at University. The low image that Home Economics has had, led us to struggle for many years to get a change in name, at least at tertiary level [...]. My vision is that once it is called NFCS, it will raise the profile of the subject. [Japonica, LHi].

Although most of the younger generation of Home Economics teachers were inclined to go for a name change, no unanimity emerged from the interviews conducted. A number of participants, including those who had less than ten years' teaching experience, tended to disagree that the name 'Home Economics' should be changed, and gave a number of reasons for their opinion. Issues of perception and status were predominant factors. However, an exercise of rebranding was felt to be needed in order to improve the subject's definition and popularity.

The status of our subject, due to its name, was, is and will always be a sore issue. On one hand, people respect us when we mention Home Economics due to its long history (100 years) in society. On the other hand, it is irritating when people refer to us as the 'cooks'. Somehow the name gives stability to the public's perception of who we are. At secondary school level, I still believe that we should keep the name Home Economics. It is through awareness that people would change their mentality. The topics that are included in the syllabus will determine the image we project of our subject. Although it inclines towards a scientific approach, our roots are still Domestic Science and I believe it should remain as such. We need to keep our roots alive [Betty, HE FGd].

If we had to change the name, people would still refer to it as Home Economics. This also happened to Textiles Studies. I believe that we should work towards improving and changing the reputation of our subject rather than change the name of our subject. I think that during these past few years we have managed to improve the content, what we really teach. Many teachers in my school are aware that Home Economics is no longer associated with cooking. This is really a big success as it means that we have moved forward in our struggle [Polly, HE FGd]

Home Economics is no longer cooking. I do agree that there are people who still view the subject in an old fashioned way and associate the subject with cooking. I acknowledge this. Then it is up to the teacher to promote the subject. Sometimes you could find schools where the subject is very popular among students, thanks to the group of teachers in that school. The teachers improve the status of the subject. When I hear teachers complaining about their subject, I always say that it depends on how they promote it [Elderflower, LHi].

The argument raised by Polly, refers to the changes in the name of what originally was called Needlework. In Malta, there is no indication in government documents when the shift in name from Needlework to Needlecraft occurred. However many administrators at the Education Department used to refer to the discipline by using

both names interchangeably. During the 1980s, official documents, including examination papers set by the Maltese Education Department and British Examination Boards used the name ‘Needlecraft’ (see Table 3.2). The first syllabus set by MATSEC in the discipline was referred to as ‘Needlecraft and Dress’ in 1993 (see Table 3.3). Three years later the name was changed to ‘Textiles and Design’. In state schools, the subject’s name remained ‘Needlework’/‘Needlecraft’ for many decades until a new name, ‘Textiles Studies’, was gradually adopted by 2002.<sup>43</sup> A couple of participants who were teaching Needlecraft at the time mentioned that the change in name had been a smooth transition, as there were also some changes in the syllabus content of the subject (Daffodil, LHi and Lily, LHi). The rebranding process was however not as effective as one might have expected. During a Prize Day attended by one of the study’s participants, when the Head of the school was handing out the prize for Textiles Studies, she overheard the following comment: ‘Is this what they started to call the subject? Has this change in name came about to remove the idea that they teach how to sew and mend things?’ (Elderflower, LHi). Another participant opined:

In the past, we used to refer to the subject as Needlework and the name was changed to Textiles Studies. Parents and students still refer to it as, “That subject we used to call Needlework”. So nothing has really changed. I believe that we need to continue to work harder to obtain a better image and reputation for the subject (Polly, HE FGd).

An appropriate process of rebranding may be part of the solution to dispel the misconceptions that are frequently associated with Home Economics and Textiles Studies. In Malta, studies related to definitions, perceptions and change in name of school subjects has not been published so far. However, some undergraduate research has been conducted in the past, shedding some light on the perception of a sample of Maltese adolescents and adults on Home Economics. Casha (2000) found many misconceptions towards the subject which were once again prominent in Gerada (2009) nearly a decade later. The study conducted by Gerada revealed that during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the perceptions of the Maltese towards the subjects did not change much, and included a high degree of misinformation and many

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<sup>43</sup> In 1997, the term Textiles Studies was officially introduced during an in-service course for teachers. This coincided with the introduced in the subject’s SEC syllabus, where the subject which was referred to as Textiles and Design. Needlecraft kept being used in examination papers and official documents until 2001.

misconceptions about Home Economics. Moreover, the results showed that the public still maintained the traditional stereotypical image of the subject. An effective publicity campaign was deemed essential in order to correct and improve the perceptions of the public about the subject.

A rebranding process was frequently mentioned by the participants, especially the ones who were against the change in name. What is rebranding and how can we rebrand Home Economics and Textiles Studies? In recent years, this issue has been addressed by several international academics of Home Economics, in order to help those involved in the field in understanding and initiating discussion on the approaches that may be utilised to remove the negative and/or inappropriate brand beliefs associated for many decades with the discipline. Pendergast (2012) argued that ‘Home Economics has not, in its 100 years history, had a clear brand that positions it to reflect its intended contribution to achieving well-being and developing lifelong learning attributes’ (p. 19).

The aim to rebrand the profession emerged from the 2008 IFHE position statement, *Home Economics for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (IFHE, 2008). This document was developed with the aim of future-proofing the profession and locating it in ‘the contemporary context, looking ahead to viable and progressive visions of home economics for the twenty-first century and beyond’ (IFHE, 2008, p.1). The IFHE stated that ‘[It] is committed to re-branding and repositioning, not renaming the profession’ (IFHE, 2008, p. 2). Pendergast (2012; 2013) claimed that there has to be a rebranding strategy to pave the way for the profession in the future. Rebranding can be of benefit to the discipline mainly in two ways. On one hand, it would acquire a new identity, and on the other, it would reach its professional goals through renewed content and pedagogies, to ensure that the knowledge and skills acquired by others are transferable and relevant for future generations (Malokwu, 2010; Malokwu and Kembe, 2012). Home Economics has to be branded in such a way as to be easily recognised by others, empowering its members to clearly ‘define and articulate their distinctive characteristics by which people come to know us’ (Pendergast, McGregor and Turkki, 2012, p. 9). In addition to the rebranding process, McGregor (2008) suggested that home economists should be ambassadors who are able to represent their profession, communicate clearly their message and portray the value of their work within the



different spheres of society. These two strategies, rebranding and representation, could be utilised to sustain the profession and give prominence to the discipline, in order for it to serve as a catalyst for the well-being of future generations.

#### **8.4 Conclusion**

The debate on name change shows that such a step involved many other issues. Attempts to change the name of Home Economics, whether successful or not, always betrayed underlying concerns regarding status, image, public perception and the subjects' identity itself. The Maltese scenario shows that these issues are not merely local in nature. However, one must also note that within the subject community itself, opinions vary and also depend, to a higher or lower degree, on differing generations of teachers, educational sector and personal experiences. Perceptions are not changed merely by changing a name. A strategy needs time, effort and a clear direction. Yet one must not let eagerness for change obscure the gains made through history, in terms of reputation and the contribution made to society by teachers of a subject with a long history such as Home Economics.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT OF HOME ECONOMICS AND TEXTILES STUDIES**

#### **9.0 Introduction**

After an analysis and discussion of the emerging themes of status, gender and name change conducted in the previous chapters, it was necessary to focus on how these issues were reflected in the Home Economics and Textiles Studies curriculum. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the published Home Economics and Textiles Studies syllabi as used by Maltese teachers in various institutions. It highlights the significant changes and modifications that were made to the content and pedagogies, including the teachers' and administrators reactions to key innovations. The influence of British syllabi was especially apparent in the content, textbooks and methodologies.

#### **9.1 The syllabi of domestic subjects in Maltese schools**

As discussed earlier, the British syllabi of the various domestic subjects served as models for their Maltese counterparts (see Chapters 3). Prior to the 1970s, it was normal practice to adopt British models, but these syllabi often required adaptations and modifications to suit the Maltese socio-political, economic and cultural context, which was different from that of Britain. The localisation of the curriculum, which corresponds to Goodson and Rudd's (2012) concept of 'refraction', became the main strategy adopted by the Maltese education authorities for curriculum change.

##### **9.1.1 The Housecraft syllabus in the primary school**

The syllabi of the primary schools were drawn up by the Board of Primary School Inspectors who normally revised them at least every three years. They were then approved by the Minister and the Director of Education (DEdF, No. 2152/65, A Brief Outline of the development of Education in Malta, 24<sup>th</sup> Sept 1965 [Anon.]). Documentary evidence shows that when new syllabi were launched or when revisions to existing syllabi were made, the Inspectress expected some feedback from the subject teachers. In the 1960s, teachers provided written and oral feedback to the Inspectress; oral feedback was usually given during one of the visits that she made to the various schools. When the comments made by the teachers were deemed valid, they were reflected in the following revisions made to the syllabi. In spite of the lack of formal

in-house training for teachers, the Inspectress often organised meetings to keep the teachers abreast of the latest pedagogies developments and content issues. By the mid-sixties, teacher training was given more importance as the syllabus followed the new trend of adopting modern pedagogical approaches that were current abroad at the time, as was also the case for other subjects in the primary school curriculum.

The structure of the new Housecraft syllabus of the primary school during the mid-sixties was a novelty in the local scene. Teachers were required to take a scientific approach in various topics, tackle the content according to separate units (sections), and encourage students' creativity (RwDE 1966). This approach was based on the trend adopted in Britain at the time.

In 1965, a five-week training course was organised for Home Economics and Needlework teachers to introduce the new syllabus.<sup>44</sup> Through a special FAO grant, the education authorities were able to cover the cost of the course and obtain a generous supply of reference books on the subject for the schools (RwDE 1965). The course was conducted by Leonarda Jurado, the Home Economics Officer at the FAO. A Home Economics teacher who attended the course was impressed by the scientific emphasis in the new approach:

Ms Watson, who came with Dr Jurado, introduced us to many scientific principles that were applied to the teaching of Housecraft. [...] I never learnt to take this approach. It was all new to me. Later on, I applied what I had learnt during the course in other areas of the subject, making it simple for my students [Clover, LHi].

This new syllabus was adopted in 1966 and primary teachers took several initiatives to apply what was required by its implementation. They organised several activities for their students, such as visits to various factories, residential homes for the elderly and hospitals. They also put on fashion shows and simple radio plays, conducted studies on young children and organised events for parents (RwDE 1967). Although the syllabus involved hands-on activities, the primary schools had very limited equipment for the teaching of Home Economics, so senior students attended the Housecraft School for a whole week to compensate for this shortcoming (RwDE

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<sup>44</sup> For a list of courses organised for Home Economics and Needlework teachers see Table 9.3.

1968). The teachers accepted this approach, even though it was a new pedagogy that required them to change some of their traditional practices. As is evident from the above mentioned reports and Clover's testimony, teachers co-operated and delivered lessons that were in line with what was required by the new syllabus, in spite of the difficulties of its implementation.

### **9.1.2 Housecraft, Cookery and Home Economics in the girls' grammar, secondary technical and secondary schools**

Whereas the subject's syllabus for primary school covered a vast number of areas related to the family and the community, the one for the grammar schools was rather limited and focused more on the traditional notion of housecraft. This was due to the external examination boards' syllabus content which the teachers were required to follow.

#### A move towards a practical approach

The establishment of the Girls' Secondary Technical School in 1959 saw the introduction of a stronger focus on pedagogies aimed at enhancing the practical component. However, the syllabus for the grammar schools remained theoretically-oriented (see Chapters 3 and 6). By the scholastic year 1959/60, a new syllabus was published to reflect the innovative ideas and methods that were being adopted in Britain, but which were modified for localisation purposes. The syllabus gave greater emphasis to the practical component which was previously given less importance. With the establishment of Housecraft/Home Economics laboratories in these schools, students were in a better position to carry out more practical tasks. In 1964, the Housecraft syllabus was mainly divided into two sections, a theoretical and a practical section. The theoretical part included topics related to personal and environmental cleanliness, home-nursing, housewifery, laundry work, home management, food and first-aid. These topics served as a basis for practical work (DEdF, No. 964/64, Girls' Grammar Schools Syllabus for 1964-65, Domestic Science – Housecraft). Despite these significant changes in the syllabus, the implementation of practical sessions in schools was not immediate across the board. A number of participants who were students in various grammar schools during this period lamented the lack of practical work that was carried out and the stronger focus on theory, which was more in line with the highly academic environment of their schools. However, one must also take

into account the limited time and funds available for conducting practical sessions, as was pointed out in the Chapter 3 and 6. Such limitations inevitably created a refraction that adapted and modified the British syllabus according to the local situation. According to the participants, teachers were reluctant to adopt this new approach due to the highly traditionally academic environment of the school, the constraints of the timetable and limited resources.

In the new syllabus for Housecraft issued for scholastic year 1967/68, more importance was given to creativity, thus bringing it closer to the primary school syllabus. It required that students enhance their creativity through various activities, with the aim of allowing them to derive a sense of satisfaction and to train them to acquire the necessary basic skills that could be applied at home (DEdF, No. 924/65, Syllabus for the Girls' Secondary Technical School 1967/68 Domestic Science: Housecraft). This syllabus, and interviews conducted for the purpose of this research, show that the students who studied Housecraft in Forms I and II, and in Form III, could opt for Cookery and follow the course until they reached Form V, when most students sat for their GCEs. The Housecraft syllabus for the girls of the Secondary Technical School contained only a fraction of what primary school students could study, as it targeted students during the first two years of secondary school and aimed 'to provide a wide general course in all aspects of Domestic Science, and to give the children important training for life' (p. 106). However, there was a strong emphasis on the practical aspect of the subject which was somewhat similar to that in primary schools:

[...] the assimilation of theory for its own sake, or for the sake of passing the examination will not be enough, and will not justify the work prescribed by the syllabus. It is the assimilation of practical experience in this field that is aimed at; and the primary aim of the teacher should be to help the girl in self-development while she is working to secure that aim (DEdF, No. 924/65, Syllabus for the Girls' Secondary Technical School 1967/68 Domestic Science: Housecraft, p. 106).

The Cookery syllabus focused especially on the practical component and students were expected to achieve high standards in culinary skills. Over the period of three years, students studied Cookery, Nutrition and Food Hygiene. In their final year, they had to work in groups to acquire practical experience in managing a small flat with the aim of completing their training in Home Management (DEdF, No. 924/65, Syllabus for

the Girls' Secondary Technical School 1967/68 Domestic Science: Cookery). This was similar to what was expected of British girls attending the secondary modern, where they had to manage a house or a flat for an extended period of time (Purvis, 1985).

The Home Economics syllabus of the primary schools, together with the syllabus for Cookery and Housecraft of the Girls' Secondary Technical, served as a foundation for the new syllabus for secondary schools for 1970 (DEdF, No. 400/72, Home Economics Syllabus for the new Secondary Schools [n.d]). The earliest version of the syllabus for secondary schools stated that 'the approach should be practical in nature and the teaching should as far as possible be based on sound scientific principles' (p. 1). However, the amount of practical work prescribed by the new syllabus was far less than that required by the old syllabus of the Girls' Secondary Technical. Teachers faced problems in adopting this approach due to the unavailability of funds for practical work at the beginning of the scholastic year. Consequently, they were restricted to teaching theory until the funds became available later on (DEdF, No. 400/72, Report on the teaching of Home Economics and Needlecraft in Secondary and Grammar Schools for the Year 1971-72).

Modifications to the 1970 syllabus for secondary schools required the organisation of two courses for teachers. The revised edition of the syllabus focused on activities intended 'to involve the pupils all the time through finding out and recording information, through planning, doing and assessing their own work and that of the group' (NFCS Archives, Revised Home Economics Syllabus Guidelines, [c1974] p. 1.). Moreover, the syllabus highlighted the importance of adopting a cross-curricular approach in certain areas and it also provided some guidelines for the implementation of correct procedures when conducting practical sessions. The new requirements were introduced to teachers during a summer vacation course held in 1974.

Another noteworthy change was made in 1979 when the topic of child care was given more importance in the Home Economics syllabus. For this reason, in May/June of the same year, the Education Officer organised an in-service course for Home Economics teachers to coincide with the International Year of the Child proclaimed by UNESCO. The aim of the course was 'to clarify the aims and objectives of teaching Childcare in Secondary Schools; to discuss ways and means of making the teaching of Childcare

more effective; [and] to update the teachers' knowledge of Childcare' (DEdF, No. 400/72, Course programme in Child Care, nd). Kindergarten classes for four-year olds had been launched in October 1975 and classes were established in a number of towns and villages over the island. Consequently, Home Economics planners decided to strengthen the topics related to child care in the syllabus, focusing on the stages of development of the growing child. This strategy indicates that the vocational aspect of the Home Economics was increasingly seen by curriculum planners as a possibility of employment opportunities for Home Economics students.

With the change in the education system from a comprehensive to a tripartite system, a new version of the Home Economics syllabus was published in 1981 (see Chapter 2 and 3). Initially, students attending the new junior lyceums followed the syllabus for Group 1 students in the secondary schools.<sup>45</sup> The Group 1 students were the most motivated and were expected to sit for GCEs examinations. On their part Group 2 students, ranged from those who were of above average intelligence but who were not motivated to sit for GCE to others who had severe learning difficulties. Hence the Home Economics syllabus for Group 2 students was divided into two sections: Section 1 consisted of 'knowledge for living' and Section 2 included aspects which were considered as being of 'secondary importance', and both areas were to be covered during their course of studies (Secondary Schools Syllabus, 1981 - Home Economics, Forms III – V, Groups II, p. 6).

A teacher who taught these two groups remembers that there was a slight difference between the syllabi:

Basically the syllabi, referred to as syllabus A and Syllabus B appeared to be the same but there were certain topics that were tackled in more depth with the students in Group 1. Group 2 students had more practical lessons as we tried to motivate them as much as possible [Marigold, LHi].

#### The nutrition and cookery aspects of the syllabus

On the establishment of secondary education for all, cookery was included within the Home Economics syllabus but special emphasis was given to nutrition. A third of the syllabus was dedicated to 'Food and Nutrition', which included similar topics to those

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<sup>45</sup> In 1983, additional topics were included in the Junior Lyceum Syllabus for Home Economics (Girls' Junior Lyceum Syllabus, Education Department, 1983).

that were covered by the Girls' Secondary Technical School Syllabus for Housecraft (Cookery section). The 'Food and Nutrition' section of the 1981 syllabus was very similar to the previous one. For instance, students in the senior classes of secondary school were to 'choose, prepare, cook and serve well balanced attractive meals for various occasions and to satisfy the needs of various people [and] to manage time, money and labour wisely' (Secondary School Syllabus 1981 – Home Economics, Forms III, IV and V, p. 3). These clear objectives, which were not included in the previous syllabus, effectively continued the trend of encouraging fully fledged practical sessions also in the 1981 programme of studies. The shift in emphasis from skills for personal benefit to skills to provide a service to others was in line with what was happening in the UK (see Table 9.1) and was also mentioned by Attar (1990).

The 1986 edition of the syllabus provides another instance of refraction. In this case, the Home Economics syllabus was modified to cater for particular health and cultural situations which were prevalent in Malta. The revised 'Food and Nutrition' section of the Home Economics syllabus reflected various local initiatives on Maltese eating habits held that year, especially the Health Development Plan for 1986-1990 for Malta, which was based on the WHO's programme 'Health for All for all by the Year 2000'. Such a revision was also required to take on board the recommendations on Maltese eating habits, which had been published following the first National Conference on Nutrition held in 1986 (Department of Health, 1986; Bellizzi, 1993). On its part, HENTA organised an in-service course and a series of lectures in collaboration with the Education Department and the Nutrition Unit of the Health Department on 'Healthy Living' (HENTA Archives, Minutes, 7 March 1986; Correspondence, The Assistant Secretary to its members, 7 July 1986). Talks conducted by various specialists dealt with changing food habits in Malta, the incidence of cardiovascular diseases and diabetes in Malta and nutrition in relation to dental and oral health. A workshop and a practical session gave participants the opportunity to discuss the Home Economics syllabus and cook traditional dishes following the new Maltese dietary guidelines which recommended the increase in dietary fibre and the reduction of salt, fats and sugars (HENTA Archives, Minutes, 27 June 1986).

A teacher who had attended this course stated that the workshop was indispensable at that time:



Many teachers attended the course. It was really important to keep up-to-date on issues related to health. The syllabus changed drastically after the course, as we were no longer allowed to use recipes that we used in the past. It was not easy to eliminate or modify some recipes as these have been taught for a very long time [Kennedia, LHi].

The difficulties mentioned by Kennedia highlight the problems encountered by most teachers during practical lessons. The adoption of this new 'Food and Nutrition' section was challenging for teachers, as the practical aspect of the syllabus included mostly traditional British recipes alongside some local traditional ones. This aspect became so important that the 2006 syllabus introduced a lesson specifically targeting the topic related to the modification of recipes, referred to as 'recipe engineering' (The Home Economics Programme of Study – Forms 3, 4, 5. 2006). Also in this case, refraction took place due to the strong need for localisation. Along the years, many teachers have created their own school-based recipe books which included modified recipes, adapting the requirements of the new syllabus to suit the situations in their classrooms. In my encounter with Home Economics teachers in secondary schools during teaching practice visits, several teachers pointed out that they find these school-based recipe books useful, as they included healthy and nutritious recipes for their students to use during practical lessons.

The revised edition of the 1986 syllabus for the nutrition section encouraged teachers to take a holistic approach to the teaching of nutrition as part of healthy living. Thus, the amended syllabus not only focused on guiding students in acquiring healthy eating habits, but also in becoming knowledgeable about other matters related to personal care, dental health and health hazards. This was the first time that some of these topics were included in the Home Economics syllabus for secondary schools. These new themes gave way to less trendy and more out-dated topics, such as flower arranging, care of metals, as well as certain unhealthy methods of cooking, pastry and cake-making.

The revised Home Economics syllabus was strengthened further with the publication of the SEC syllabus published by MATSEC in 1994, which was broadly similar but not identical to the state school syllabus. The teachers preparing students for SEC had to follow both syllabi to ensure that all the topics were covered for both the school annual examination and for that of SEC. Although this situation was partially remedied

in the new syllabus issued for scholastic year 1998/1999, some participants still felt that it was unfair on them to have to follow two different syllabi (Home Economics Curriculum [1998]).

#### The decline of the practical component

The shift from a practical/utilitarian curriculum to one based on coursework was as an approach taken by Home Economics educators to promote the academic status of the subject. Although the status issue, was not explicitly mentioned by the participants of this study, some claimed there were several factors for this move.

Despite the strong emphasis on healthy eating and healthy living, cookery started losing importance in the Home Economics syllabus. This occurred due to a number of factors. International and local initiatives towards healthy eating influenced the content of practical sessions. For instance, traditional Maltese dishes, with the exception of few that could be modified, and dishes that were deemed unhealthy were eliminated completely. Also, the introduction of coursework in 1996 brought about a modification in the assessment procedure used in the syllabus. The inclusion of investigative work in the local Home Economics syllabus followed the trend set by external examination boards. Further new assessment procedures were adopted in the Home Economics SEC syllabus by MATSEC in 1999 and 2006. In 1999, a coursework component was included in the syllabus to follow the approach taken by state school syllabus, and in 2006 the practical sessions which were previously assessed externally by examiners, began to be assessed internally by the school class teacher. In addition, these practical sessions which consisted of an average of two sessions conducted under examinations conditions, also formed part of the school assessment.

Some of the participants of this study made several comments on the practical component of the subject. They unanimously agreed that students were attracted to the subject due to its practical slant. One remarked that although there had been a slight decrease in practicals over the years, students still see the practical element as a prominent part of the subject. She added:

We still allocate a percentage of the final mark to the practical component. We start this form of assessment from Form 1. That is, students still give

practicals their due importance. In fact, during the practicals, students really work hard to present their work to perfection. When they carry out a practical, we give it an exam format. They take it very seriously [Juniper, LHi].

The issue of timetabling was also identified as a constraint that influenced the practical sessions. In the following interview excerpt, Juniper describes the gradual changes that were carried out to suit the ever decreasing duration of lessons that she experienced during her teaching career.

We had to reduce the work considerably during the practical. For example, in the past students used to prepare a three-course meal. Later on it was cut down to a two-course and now one-course. [...] The duration of the lessons was reduced for Home Economics and other options due to an additional lesson known as 'form period' where the students meet their class tutor. In the past, the lesson used to extend to the lunch break. The students used to come early during the break or leave later. But this is no longer possible, as now it is all related to human rights. Students and teachers have a right to their lunch break. So practicals can only be conducted in the time available for the lesson [Juniper, LHi].

Some teachers also argued that the majority of their students show less aptitude for practical work. Others argued that in the past, students were more competent in practical skills as they used to contribute in the preparation of meals at home. As a result of the lack of hands-on experience, students spend more time on a cooking task than in previous years. In the light of this trend, the syllabus of 2006 catered for these new realities encountered by most Home Economics teachers. It specified that in practical assignment tests, the number of dishes that students were expected to prepare was reduced to a one-course meal/dish and a beverage. Anecdotal evidence suggests that at some point it was agreed that students were to prepare dishes for a single person, although no documentary evidence corroborates this. In previous years, students were instructed to prepare a number of dishes or a three course meal usually prepared for two people, as displayed in Table 9.1 which shows a sample of different practical assignment tests that were published by different examination boards over the decades.

In addition, the number of practical sessions indicated in the syllabus was drastically reduced. Some teachers lamented that:

How can students acquire the necessary skills without doing enough practical work? We then criticise them for not being able to finish in the allotted time. How can you expect them to prepare and cook a main course, prepare a drink and lay the table in a double lesson? We need more practical sessions [Starflower, HE FGd].

The content of the Home Economics practical component had also changed during the years. Teachers were guided by the questions set by the different examination boards. During the 1960s, the assignment tests set by the Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations for Housecraft and Cookery focused mainly on practical tasks related to home management and food preparation respectively. Occasionally, the practical examination in Housecraft included some food related tasks as is evident from Table 9.1. When the syllabus changed in 1975, the practical assignment tests contained a strong focus on food preparation and a simple home management task, sometimes also related to sewing. This model was also adopted by the ULSEB and the MATSEC Examination Board until the latter changed the syllabus in 1999. Since then, the practical assignment tests focus solely on food and nutrition (see Table 9.1).

School-based practical assignment tests followed the ones set by British and Maltese examination boards as seen from the sample given in Table 9.2.

A teacher who prepared students to sit for the examination set by the University of Oxford described the assignment tests that were given:

At that time, the practical component included a task or 'job'. This was part of the practical exam. They either had laundry work or housework. I remember that the students used to prepare meals and carry out the task as well. We had the flat which was used to train students to do these things [Juniper, LHi].

<b>PRACTICAL TESTS</b>	<b>(University of Oxford)</b>
<i>Housecraft (1962)</i> Wash and finish a tablecloth and two table napkins. Thoroughly clean a dining-room table and two chairs. Write out the menu and lay lunch for two. Arrange flowers for the table.	
<i>Cookery (1964)</i> You are on holiday at the sea-side. Prepare and serve a breakfast for yourself, to include a fish. Also prepare and serve a supper for a friend and yourself, after a day spent on the sea-shore.	
<i>Domestic Science/Cookery (1970)</i> Prepare, cook and serve weekend dinner for a small family. Make a Victoria sandwich cake for tea.	
<i>Domestic Science/Housecraft (1971)</i> By means of a washing machine or hand-washing as appropriate, wash and hang to dry garments of wool, nylon and cotton, some bed linen and a net curtain. Iron a pre-washed tablecloth and a frilled-edge pillow case or cushion cover. Clean a pair of suede shoes and a pair of canvas shoes. Polish a small table or trolley. Make and serve coffee, sandwiches with a filling of your own make and home-made biscuits.	
<i>Home Economics (1977)</i> Launder a variety of items from the family wash. Use a steam iron. Cook a two course supper for two people including some fried food. Mend a tear in a pair of jeans.	
<b>TEST ASSIGNMENTS</b>	<b>(University of London)</b>
<i>Home Economics (1988)</i> Prepare, cook and serve a selection of dishes for two weight-conscious office workers which would be suitable for their evening meal. Show awareness of current nutritional guidelines. One of the adult has an important meeting the next day. Carry out one or more tasks which would improve the appearance of his/her clothes which are to be worn at the meeting.	
<i>Home Economics (1990)</i> Your English pen-friend is coming to stay with you for a holiday. Prepare, cook and serve a special weekend meal which includes some of your national dishes. Show awareness of current nutritional guidelines. In addition, carry out a selection of household tasks which have been made necessary by this visit.	
<b>TEST ASSIGNMENTS</b>	<b>(MATSEC Examinations Board)</b>
<i>Home Economics (1993)</i> Your penfriend, who is a vegetarian, is spending her holidays in Malta with you. Prepare, cook and serve a meal for both of you keeping her diet in mind. Launder a woollen cardigan.	
<i>Home Economics (1999)</i> You attend a sports centre regularly for fitness training. Prepare, cook and pack <u>three</u> totally different healthy items for you and your friend to eat after your training sessions. Include a suitable drink.	

**Table 9.1:** A selection of practical test assignments prepared by the Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations, ULSEB and the MATSEC Examinations Board for Housecraft, Cookery and Home Economics (Source: Various practical papers published by the different examination boards).

<p><i>1991</i></p> <p>Your mother has to undergo a major operation. Prepare, cook and serve a selection of dishes which could be used by the family whilst your mother is in hospital. Launder a nightdress for your mother.</p>
<p><i>1994</i></p> <p>You have invited your friend who is a lacto-vegetarian to come and spend an evening with you. Prepare, cook and serve a light meal for both of you. Also carry out the cleaning of the dining room.</p>
<p><i>2009</i></p> <p>You have been invited to spend a weekend with your elderly aunt who suffers from osteoporosis and constipation. You have offered to prepare a meal for her. Prepare, cook and serve a main course for your aunt keeping in mind your aunt's special dietary requirements. Serve a suitable drink with the meal.</p>
<p><i>2010</i></p> <p>Your friend is lactose intolerant. Prepare, cook and serve a healthy dish suitable for her condition. Include also a suitable drink for your friend.</p>

**Table 9.2:** Home Economics practical examinations (Source: Home Economics (Practical), Annual Examinations, 1991; 1994, Form V, Maria Regina Junior Lyceum Blata l-Bajda; Home Economics (Practical), Annual Examinations, 2009 and 2010, Form IV and Form V, St Margaret College, Żejtun Girls' Secondary School).

When the Home Economics secondary school syllabus changed in 1996, the focus of the practical component was on food and nutrition and no longer included an element of home management. The type of assigned practical work gave more emphasis to the needs of different members of the family, those requiring specific diets and others experiencing health-related conditions (see Tables 9.1 and 9.2). The change in focus from home-management skills to the needs of the individual and families followed the trend set in the US as shown by Vincenti (1997). From 1996 onwards, several in-service courses focused on these new aspects of the Home Economics syllabus and the modifications made to it. Some of those interviewed for this study attended these courses and shared their concern on several aspects of the new syllabus requirements, both for state schools and for SEC. Some in-services course were organised to obtain feedback from teachers about the new or modified syllabus, in order to conduct the necessary changes according to the feedback received, which will be discussed below.

#### The coursework – a new mode of assessment

The introduction of the coursework in the early 1990s as a mode of assessment, following the trends taken some years earlier in Britain (Attar, 1990) was a new and an important change to the Maltese Home Economics syllabus. The coursework element required students to carry out a number of tasks which on completion were assessed by the teacher. It included an investigation and a portfolio of students' work

conducted on a range of practical and theoretical activities which led the student to acquire a number of investigative skills.

The Education Officer and the HoDs responsible for the subject provided support for the teachers on this innovative aspect of the syllabus. The coursework brought about a new approach to decision-making and problem-solving skills as applied in Home Economics. Many teachers who were interviewed argued that the coursework was an addition to the already loaded and crammed syllabus as it introduced a new pedagogy which was different from the customary ones. Juniper recounted her experience about this innovation as follows:

Well...It wasn't easy. The introduction of the investigation was a big change in the syllabus. It was introduced for everyone, for all schools... The coursework included a portfolio and an investigation to be in line with the SEC examination. We had to work on our own. You had to think of a suitable way how to work on it. It wasn't an easy task to teach the students how to work on an investigation. [...] No in-service course was organised for the teachers. It was some years later when an in-service course about investigations was organised, as teachers were constantly asking for help [...] Some teachers were old and found it rather difficult. Teachers were interested to know how to teach the investigation to their students. It was more work for us teachers and students [Juniper, LHi].

There were different perceptions on the introduction of the coursework component in the Home Economics syllabus. A participant who was also teaching at that time was against it, arguing that her students were not gaining any benefits from this approach:

Initially we were on our own. By time, we got used to it. Now we teach everything through an investigative approach, whether it is practical work or theory. Sometimes I wonder what the students are gaining from preparing an investigation and portfolio for their examinations. I acknowledge the fact that the investigations help students to develop their thinking skills but there are other methods how this can be carried out. [...] This is a waste of valuable time spent on other topics found in the syllabus. We find students who copy the work of past students, even those who used to attend our school. So, what are the students learning from all this? [Poppy, LHi]

Another participant was in favour of the coursework component, stating that students benefit greatly if the coursework is taught in the proper way. However, she argued that

the volume of work had to be reduced due to the large amount of topics that need to be covered in the syllabus.

When you guide the students from Form I, they manage to grasp the concept of tackling the investigation. You need to do something about it during every lesson. You need to take some time from other topics to tackle the investigation. If students are really weak, you need to help them a great deal in order for them to reach certain standards and this means that you need to cover less material in some topics [Marigold, LHi].

Another teacher took a different view, arguing that as the investigation was an integral part of the formative assessment for all students, especially those in the first three years of secondary school, it should be made a meaningful experience for them. She maintained that:

The problem-solving approach should reflect progressive teaching and critical pedagogy where the students would be encouraged to apply knowledge, reflect upon and transform themselves by learning how to put theory into practice for life. Unfortunately this is not the case for many students studying Home Economics (Betty, HE FGd].

The coursework became an integral part of Home Economics education. The coursework was developed and refined in subsequent versions of the syllabus. By 1998, it consisted of one investigation and two practical assignments, with the exception of Form IV where students were required to carry out five short tasks instead of an investigation, in addition to the two practical assignments (Home Economics Curriculum, [1998]). In earlier Home Economics syllabi, a total of 50% of the marks was allocated to the assessment of the practical component, including of a practical test conducted under examination conditions and assessed using the score card system (see Appendix 15 for a sample of a score sheet). The two practical assignments, which were required for this new syllabus carried a total of 30 marks out of the 50 allotted for the coursework component. Some of the practical sessions related to food gave way to the new coursework component, which was also the trend taken by the local SEC examination in the 1990s.<sup>46</sup> The new approach changed the traditional emphasis on the practical element which was previously prominent in Home Economics lessons.

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<sup>46</sup> The coursework component in Home Economics was introduced in the SEC examination in 1995.



Home Economics was one of the first subjects to introduce coursework as a mode of assessment. It took more than a decade for other subjects to follow suit. During a meeting organised by MATSEC for chairpersons of various subjects, which I personally attended, it was pointed out that Home Economics and Textiles Studies were the pioneers in this mode of assessment in Malta.

Some years after the introduction of the coursework, the new Education Officer responsible for Home Economics and Needlecraft organised a number of in-service courses to guide the teachers on various other aspects of the syllabus (see Table 9.3).

The version of the syllabus of 2006 was highly prescriptive and it set parameters for the teachers, as it included learning outcomes which set a limit to the amount of knowledge, skills and attitudes expected from their students (The Home Economics Programme of Study, 2006 – Forms 3, 4, 5). The syllabus also included the number of lessons they were required for each topic.

As you know, Home Economics is vast and a number of teachers complain about this. This syllabus [2006] put a limit on the depth of the topics covered in our subject. In the past, there used to be questions in examinations which asked for too much detail. It was possible that some teachers would not have covered that particular topic during the year. This was not fair on them. So the learning objectives provide a certain uniformity. This is what the teachers wanted [Juniper, LHi].

Teachers who took part in the Home Economics online focus groups provided positive feedback on the 2006 syllabus. Some stated that the layout was better and easier to follow, while others maintained that the syllabus set limits and created uniformity for all teachers.

During these past years, the in-service courses focused on refining these learning outcomes. It was quite problematic to come to a unanimous agreement about what should be included in certain topics. However this helped us to focus on what we really wanted our students to acquire. Over the years some topics have been removed since they are tackled in other subjects, such as smoking and alcohol abuse [Chevy, HE FGd].

This version of the syllabus, however, had a short life span. A new version which included detailed teaching objectives and learning outcomes but catered only for Forms I and II, was published in 2011 following a widespread curriculum review by

the Education Directorates to meet the needs of a differentiated learning environment. The process was interrupted due to the publication of the NCF in 2013, which brought about a new curriculum.

## **9.2 The Needlework/Needlecraft/Textiles Studies curriculum**

Available archival documents show that over the years, the changes made to the Textiles Studies syllabus were less frequent and substantial when compared to those of Home Economics. Most revisions to the Needlework syllabus made prior to the 1980s followed similar changes that took place in the subject's syllabi in other countries, especially Britain. In the 1950s and 1960s, other domestic subjects, mainly Housecraft, exerted influence on the Needlework syllabus.

### **9.2.1 The Needlework syllabus for primary and secondary girls**

By 1964, the Needlework syllabus catered for girls in the primary school up to Standard IV. However, that year the syllabus was improved to emphasise creativity, and aimed to develop the girls' confidence in acquiring the correct procedures involved in dressmaking (RwDE 1964).

In 1965, the changes made to the Housecraft syllabus prompted modifications to its Needlework counterpart, as the Education Department merged both programmes of studies for senior girls of the primary school. The Needlework curriculum was substantially reduced and was incorporated into the Home Economics syllabus as an area called Needlework and Textiles. This new syllabus catered for girls in Standards V and VI (DEdF, No. 18/65, Primary School Syllabus for Home Economics [1965/1966]).

The Needlework syllabus of the secondary/grammar schools, unlike that of Housecraft, mainly emphasised the practical aspect of the subject. For instance, the Needlework Grammar School syllabus of 1963/64 was divided into two sections, cutting-out, which was related to pattern drafting, and needlework, which focused on dress making (DEdF, No. 925/65, Girls' Grammar Schools Syllabus. Domestic Science – Needlework [Amendments and Alterations for 1963/64]). In a further addition of the syllabus, embroidery and repair work occupied another large portion of the syllabus (DEdF, No. 966/66, Syllabus of Lyceum and the Girls' Grammar Schools [1965/66]).

Two past students who studied the subject for five years at the girls' grammar school during the early 1960s had very clear memories of the syllabus content, especially the part concerning drafting. Drafting of paper patterns and working numerous amount of samplers were the two main teaching strategies used by Needlework teachers in grammar schools (see Appendix 16 for a selection of photographs of samples prepared by a Form III grammar school student during scholastic year 1962/63).

In Forms 1, 2 and 3 we used to make those samplers. They were very boring to do. During the first three years we focused mainly on the samplers and *lots of theory* [her emphasis] and patterns. These used to take a lot of time. [...] There again, the teachers who taught us were dressmakers. They were not trained, so the lessons consisted of lots of theory and the patterns which took away so much time. All in inches, no calculator [...] So it used to take a lot of time to make a paper pattern, and we never managed to finish the garment [Daffodil, LHi].

Lily added that:

We used to do samplers and we learnt how to make patterns on a squared copybook. We also learnt cutting out. We learnt a lot through the construction of these samplers. We were also made to sit for a practical examination in Needlework [...] The subject was very instructional with no creativity [Lily, LHi].

Lily's remark shows how following strict instructions and emphasis on precision in working out the various samplers were the main features of Needlework pedagogy in these schools. As she pointed out in another part of the interview, the way Needlework was taught at the grammar school was different from that at Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary Technical, where the creative aspect of the subject was given prominence. The different methods of instruction used in the different schools depended on the type of students and the approach taken by the Needlework teachers and their interpretation of the syllabus. Although both schools eventually presented their students for the same GCE examination in Needlework, the students at the Secondary Technical were more inclined towards the creative aspect of the subject than their grammar school counterparts.

The syllabus issued in 1967, confirmed the same emphasis on the practical aspect of the subject (DEdF, No. 924/65, Girls' Secondary Technical School 1967/68, Domestic

Science: Needlework).<sup>47</sup> Before the Needlework syllabus for 1967-68 was published, the Education Department sought feedback from the Needlework teachers, especially those from the Grammar Schools. The teachers lamented that the syllabus was vast and in Forms I and II, with one double lesson per week, they were unable to cover all the topics. In addition, they argued that students would have benefited of more individual attention if the classes were split into smaller groups for Needlework lessons (DEdF, No. 966/66). The suggestion of splitting the groups was deemed pertinent, and a few years later, on the introduction of comprehensive education, the number of students in Needlework classes were reduced to around 16 students.

### **9.2.2 The aspect of creativity**

Creativity and originality were introduced as key aspects in the Needlework syllabus of 1966. The grammar school programme of studies for 1966-1967 explicitly pointed out that the aim of Needlework teaching in these schools should be ‘to give scope to the creativity abilities of the girls through the various media of needlework and so to help them derive satisfaction from the work which they do’ (DEdF, No. 966/66, Girls’ Grammar Schools Syllabus. Domestic Science – Needlework, 1966-67, p. 99). Creativity kept its prominence in the syllabi published in later years, especially those of the early 1980s. Sr Helen Curmi, who was a lecturer in Textiles and Fabric Design, argued that:

The needlework that was done when grandmother was a child, put emphasis upon making neat and accurate designs on such things as samples, fancy doilies and prepared tapestry designs; carefully following the prepared colour arrangements and stamped pattern. This sort of meticulous busy work would give little satisfaction or be of little value to the children of today, who need and demand to be challenged by problems for which they can seek their own solutions. Today’s approach to stitchery should be exploratory in nature [...]. To learn to copy is one thing; but to be original, to follow one’s own pre-envisaged plans, to keep one’s own ideas flowing, to think, to decide, to change, to be filled with excitement of unknown possibilities ahead, to develop a plan of a design and then execute it, this is creativity (Curmi, H. [1982], np.).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Although the original document of the Needlework syllabus was labelled for the Girls’ Secondary Technical School, in the main text it specified that it was for the Grammar School. There is no indication whether both used the same syllabus.

<sup>48</sup> She was influential in the development of modern teaching techniques in Needlecraft in the B.A. Education degree course at the University of Malta.

During her teaching career, Curmi was very keen to develop the creative talents in her students. Her experience at the Digby Stewart College of Education and Goldsmith's College in London, proved valuable in her efforts at consolidating the creativity aspect in the Maltese Needlework syllabus. Among other initiatives, she conducted a short course for all Home Economics and Needlework secondary school teachers focusing on creativity, emphasizing how this aspect could be developed in their lessons. This course was the first of its kind for teachers. Curmi had a great impact on her students and the Needlework teachers. Two participants who were teachers at the time stated that she inspired them to further develop their creative skills and passed them on to their students.

The Needlecraft programme of studies published in 1981 emphasised the creation of a stimulating classroom environment and the fostering of a sense of observation. Students were encouraged to collect items that could inspire them in their work during the Needlecraft lessons. A section dedicated to creative work was included for all levels, from Form I to Form V (Secondary School Syllabus 1981 – Needlecraft, Forms I and II). The syllabus guidelines for the senior years of secondary schooling specified that Group 1 students were to develop and nurture their creative ability throughout their course of studies. Moreover, the syllabus also emphasised the concept of enjoyment through creativity. The syllabus moved away from traditional embroidery and encouraged the use of more creative techniques also applied to different fabrics. For this reason, creative machine embroidery was newly introduced in the programme of studies for Form V students, and techniques, such as tie and dye, printing on fabric and fabric collages where creativity could flourish were strongly promoted (Secondary School Syllabus 1981 – Needlecraft, Forms III, IV, V). The Group 2 students who studied Needlecraft were not expected to be as creative as their Group 1 counterparts (see Chapter 2). The syllabus provided less instances where Group 2 students could develop their creative skills (Secondary School Syllabus 1981 – Needlecraft, Forms III, IV, V - Group II).

Two interviewees who were teaching Needlework at the time made a comparison between the syllabus they followed as secondary school students and the one which was developed in the early 1980s.

When I was a student in the grammar school, the Needlework syllabus lacked creativity. There was a great leap in emphasis on the creative aspect many years later, around the mid-1970s, when I started teaching. At that time I was one of the new graduates who had studied a lot about creativity at the Malta College of Education [Elderflower, LHi].

The grammar school syllabus did not include any creative aspect. But when I was at Mater Admirabilis Training College, our lecturer, Ms Ball, was very creative. She used to leave us free to experiment and she would then help us to be more creative and refine our creativity skills... The creative element in the syllabus of the 1980s was introduced very slowly. Not all the Needlework teachers were ready for the change. Personally, I can say that some courses which I attended in the UK, especially the one at Chichester Art College, helped me develop my creativity further [Daffodil, LHi].

Personally, when I was in secondary school, I was not trained to be creative at all. When I was studying Needlework at Advanced level, I was given guidance on how I could be creative. In fact, at first it was very difficult to take on this concept. The secondary schooling I experienced, did not allow me to develop my creativity. I had to wait until my post-secondary education when I could work on being creative in my work.

In the late 1990s, the newly modified syllabus for Textiles Studies (Needlecraft) further emphasised the component of creative work (Junior Lyceum and Secondary School Syllabuses for Form 1 to Form 5 – Textiles Studies (Needlecraft) [1998]). The pedagogy concerning creativity skill became more systematic. For instance, Form II students were also expected to design and sew an article, ‘using creatively one method or a combination of two methods of fabric construction’ (p. 8). To further enhance the artistic and creative talents of the students, the 1998 syllabus featured fashion design as a new topic for Textiles Studies. This area introduced students to the world of fashion designers, fashion drawings and mood boards. Fashion design featured as a theme of one of the in-service courses organised in 2005 for Textiles Studies teachers (Education Division, 2005). Additional revisions to the syllabus introduced a whole section for fashion, which included more emphasis on fashion sketching and fashion trends, including information about the top fashion designers and houses (Textiles Studies Syllabus – Forms I - 5 [2006]). One of the participants recounted that:

When I show the students the various mood boards and fashion drawings that past students have made, they get really excited and become very eager to create their own designs. You have to see what they create in order to see how students, some of very low ability, manage to show their artistic talents! [Barbara, TS FGd]

### **9.2.3 The practical component and the coursework**

The practical aspect of Needlework formed an integral part of the subject's syllabus ever since it was taught in schools (Portelli, 2009). Along the years, the theoretical component increased, alongside the practical component. In the mid-sixties, students were expected to carry out simple to more advanced processes related to dress-making. Items varied from a simple Housecraft apron and a dirndl skirt to more elaborate garments such as a pleated skirt and a dressing gown (DEdF, No. 966/66, Girls' Grammar Schools Syllabus. Domestic Science – Needlework, 1966-67). The syllabus of 1981, for the first two years of secondary schooling still required the students to make the same items. However, there was a significant change in that the drafting of pattern as the basis of all garment making was eliminated and students were expected to use commercial patterns (Secondary School Syllabus, 1981 – Needlecraft, Forms I and II).

In addition to the practical component, the 1981 syllabus included a large amount of theoretical work, which comprised of topics related to the nature of textiles and grooming. In the update to the 1981 syllabus circulated to teachers, greater emphasis was given to knowledge related to fibres and fabric and, to a lesser extent to the construction of garments which required very refined skills. Later on, the 1998 Textiles Studies syllabus saw the introduction of consumer education and simple experiments on fabrics, accompanied by a shift away from the practical component of dress-making, which was tackled in a more theoretical manner. The rationale behind the move towards theory was explicitly noted:

The theoretical base is designed to provide the background knowledge to textiles so that the awareness of the part which textiles plays in the home and family may be developed throughout the course. This provides the base for the development of various skills in practical situations (Junior Lyceum and Secondary School Syllabuses for Form 1 to Form 5 – Textiles Studies (Needlecraft) [1998], p. a).

The interviews conducted for this study show that it was common practice to have separate lessons for theory and practical work, as teachers believed that the syllabus included a strong percentage of theory. However, one participant was of the opinion that theory and practical work need to be given equal importance in class, and having separate lessons was an incorrect approach. She argued that:

We teach a practical subject. So I cannot plan a theory lesson without including practical. If I start with theory, I have to continue with the practical. Our teaching style is totally different from that of Home Economics. You cannot teach theory on its own. That is not the way to teach the subject [Cyclamen, LHi].

Various participants lamented that students' sewing skills deteriorated through the years. Personally, I noticed this shortcoming in the work presented by candidates for SEC T&D. In the 1990s, although the syllabus increased the theoretical component, candidates' practical work was very elaborate and included garments finished to a very high standards. Over the following two decades, the level of the practical work decreased drastically. Some participants pointed out that the main reason for the deterioration of practical skills was due to the reduced time allotted for practical work in the syllabus.

The syllabus is loaded with topics related to theory. Our students need more hands-on and practical experience. You need more than a double lesson to provide individual attention when practicing on sewing machines. Also, most students cannot practice at home as they don't have one, so it is very difficult to improve their practical skills [Barbara, TS FGd].

One participant claimed that apart from the syllabus, lesson duration was another issue for Textiles Studies teachers. Lessons had become shorter and students were not willing to do practical work during their mid-day break.

In the past, the Needlecraft room was used all the time. Students used to come during their break to work on their practical work. Fifth formers used to sew very elaborate garments. Those students were different. They were very skilful as they got a lot of help from home. Nowadays students do not find any help at home as most probably nobody knows how to sew and they do not even have a sewing machine [Cyclamen, LHi].



The reduction of the practical component followed the trend of the Home Economics syllabus in force during those years. The Textiles Studies teachers, similar to their Home Economics counterparts, failed to mention the improvement of status as being one of the reasons for the reduction of practical lessons. However, the introduction of fashion design as a new topic in the syllabus provided a better image for the subject, which was previously seen by many as ‘sewing and mending’ [Elderflower, LHi].

The introduction of the coursework component was an innovation of the 1998 Textiles Studies syllabus and aimed ‘to provide the students with the opportunity to... display the relevant manipulative, organisational, managerial and communication skills as appropriate [...]’ (Textiles Studies Coursework Memorandum – Assessment Criteria for Prepared Work, Junior Lyceum/Secondary School Forms 1 - 5 [1998], p. 1). The coursework included a portfolio that was different for every year group, and it comprised a range of processes carried out during the making up of textile items, such as a simple garment and a creative piece of work. The new trend adopted to tackle creative work was the design-brief approach. The 1998 syllabus also included detailed ‘Assessment criteria for prepared work’, which were drawn up for each year group. In 1990, the Education Officer organised an in-service course for Textiles Studies teachers to discuss revisions to the 1998 syllabus and the newly introduced coursework and assessment criteria (Education Division, 1999). In the following years, additional in-services courses were organised to revise and refine the syllabus, especially the coursework component (see Table 9.3).

In subsequent revised versions of the Textiles Studies syllabus, the coursework was further developed to incorporate also the practical aspects of fashion design and a sample of practical SEC past papers (Textiles Studies Syllabus – Forms I - 5 [2006]). A score card system replacing the previous criteria of assessment, was also adopted for every year group to facilitate the work of the teacher when assessing the students’ practical part of the coursework (see Appendix 17 for a sample of a score sheet used for Textiles Studies).

Some participants were of the opinion that although the coursework component was an improvement in the Textiles Studies syllabus, it still added work for teachers and students. One participant, a former examiner for SEC T&D, lamented that teachers spend more time on practical work than on theory.

Candidates fare badly when answering examination questions in SEC papers. It is evident that candidates are not trained enough in the theory. I believe that teachers spend too much time on garment making and creative work. In the past, it was the same thing. Candidates used to present highly processed garments and so there was no time for theory [Lily, LHi].

A new syllabus had been in the pipeline since 2009, when a draft version was issued for implementation by teachers on a trial basis. Two years later, the Textiles Studies syllabus for Forms I and II was published, addressing differentiated teaching and including teaching objectives and learning outcomes. However, as from scholastic year 2014-2015, the subject was removed as an option for students in Form I and Form II in secondary schools but remained an option for students in Form III, rendering the 2011 modifications irrelevant.

### **9.3 Home Economics and Textiles Studies at post-secondary education**

For many decades, at Sixth Form level, Home Economics and Needlecraft were taught according to the syllabi of the University of Oxford. Prior to 1960, the domestic subjects offered at Advanced level were Cookery and Needlework. In the following decades, these subjects experienced name changes at Advanced level, without any undergoing any major changes in content.<sup>49</sup>

The examination in Cookery at Advanced level was offered in Malta for the first time in the mid-1960s. A participant of this study was one of the first candidates who sat for this examination. She recalled:

When I went to apply for the exam, I was told that the exam was not held in Malta. I would have to go to England to sit for the exam. I replied defiantly, “It doesn’t matter, I will go to England.” And the next thing I know was that the department arranged for me to sit for the exam in Malta, probably after consulting Ms. Chetcuti. In fact, Ms. Chetcuti was the examiner for the practical exam. She was the Maltese representative for Oxford and the exam paper was adjusted for the Maltese situation [Jasmine, LHi].

Some participants of this study mentioned that it was common practice to modify the examination paper according to local needs. The syllabus had a British cultural setting

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<sup>49</sup> For an overview of the changes in names of the syllabi and examinations offered at Advanced level by the University of Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations see Table 3.2 – Chapter 3.

and some aspects were not relevant to the Maltese context. Initially, Chetcuti, the Inspectress, was responsible for the modification and the marking of the examination papers of local candidates, including the practical sessions of the examination. When Chetcuti retired in the 1976, this task was taken over by her successor, Joyce Pullicino. Some topics required localisation such as Housing and Social Services found in the common paper. By January, the Inspectress and later the Education Officer used to receive the examination paper from the UK. They then modified it accordingly and sent it back to the UK for vetting together with the relevant marking scheme. It was usual practice for the University of Oxford Delegacy of Examinations to accept the modifications suggested locally.

In my personal experience, when I was studying for my Advanced level in the mid-1980s, the syllabus was heavily oriented towards the British context. This was understandable as the syllabus was not prepared locally. I found some topics very interesting, although I was aware that they were not relevant to the Maltese situation. Although our lessons were focused on the British context and we used British textbooks, our teacher tried her best to make reference to the Maltese situation. Information on these topics was very limited. There were no books that tackled the local scenario, especially social services and housing, so most of the information was given to us by the teacher or obtained through discussion programmes transmitted on television or radio. Consequently, although the modification of the examination papers was greatly beneficial, it was still difficult for students to obtain enough information to answer examination questions related to the local setting. In later years, students sitting for the Advanced level examination were expected to visit various government departments to obtain information through interviews and leaflets about the services available locally on particular topics that were included in the syllabus. The modifications to the Advanced level Home Economics syllabus and examination papers to suit the Maltese context constitute another instance of refraction.

Inevitably, modifications made to the syllabus by the University of Oxford directly affected Maltese students. In 1976 and 1981, substantial changes saw the introduction of coursework and the modification of the general paper, which included social services, home planning and management, and health and safety in the home, as three separate papers along with a theory paper. The practical and coursework components

were split into separate papers (University of Oxford Delegacy of Examinations, 1976; 1981).

The final major revision to the syllabus made by the University of Oxford before it ceased being offered to Maltese candidates occurred in 1990, when Food and Nutrition and Dress and Fabrics were amalgamated under one main syllabus under the name of Home Economics. Apart from the changes in the names of the various papers, the syllabi also required the adoption of an investigative and experimental approach (University of Oxford Delegacy of Examinations, 1991). This syllabus constituted a problem for local Sixth Form teachers, due to its complete overhaul and innovative approach as well as to the changes in coursework. Two of the participants who taught at Sixth Form remarked:

The first change that I noticed in the syllabus was that the practical component was no longer examinable. Unfortunately, the practical aspect of the subject was never re-introduced. Instead, they introduced three investigations. [...] We used to cram everything and we had a hectic time trying to cover the whole syllabus. [...] We used to send for the guidelines, reports and specimen coursework from the University of Oxford to see how we could work the investigation. It was hard work both, for the students and for the teachers [Camellia, LHi].

The investigatory approach adopted by the new syllabus was a huge change. We had to learn on our own. There was no training for us teachers. I used to carefully read any papers and reports that we received from the University of Oxford. Looking back, I was not against this approach or the coursework, as it had its formative aspect which at the time was innovative [Elderflower, LHi].

The innovative approach took the local teachers by surprise. The practical component, which had been the core element of the subjects at all levels for many decades, was eliminated. When I was a Sixth Form student in 1984, I spent about three hours every week doing practical work in food and nutrition which involved a substantial amount of planning and preparation. Sixth form teachers were against the abolition of the practical component in both subjects as it was considered part of their essence.

When the MATSEC local examination system was established, students no longer sat for the Advanced level syllabus offered by the University of Oxford. The new Home Economics syllabus, referred to as Home Economics and Human Ecology, replaced

the foreign syllabus in 1996 for Home Economics/Nutrition and Food Science, since the remit of the local syllabus panel did not include a new syllabus to replace Home Economics/Design and Textiles. A participant of this study who was on the syllabus panel for Home Economics and Human Ecology in the early 1990s when the new Advanced level syllabus was being drawn, stated that they were in a strait jacket and they tried to save what they could from the Textiles component. A decision was taken to incorporate elements of Design and Textiles in the coursework of Home Economics and Human Ecology. The same participant added that for an Advanced level subject to be reduced to a small component of the coursework of another subject was not enough for those who were keen on keeping the subject alive. She confided that there were plans to draw up an Advanced level syllabus for Design and Textiles, but these never materialised, with the result that those students interested in the subject either have to choose Home Economics and Human Ecology or opt for something else.

The first version of the Advanced level syllabus for Home Economics and Human Ecology was similar to the Nutrition and Food Science syllabus published by the University of Oxford for 1991. It retained a similar layout which consisted of a core and a Nutrition paper, and a coursework and investigation. According to a former member of the syllabus panel, it was important to retain most aspects of the foreign syllabus, especially the coursework, as this had proved successful and popular in Britain. Most of the content and the investigative approach in the UK syllabus were also adopted locally. Some new topics were introduced and there was a slight modification to the coursework (referred later as 'portfolio') and investigation. Candidates could opt to conduct their coursework and investigation on any of five areas of specialisation, in later years referred to as 'option areas': 'Food Technology, Textile Studies, Child Care, The Senior Members of Society and Hospitality' (MATSEC Examinations Board, 1994b, p. 135). The amount of work that was expected from the candidates for the coursework and investigation was also different.

The initial adoption of the British Home Economics syllabus as a starting point was important for all stakeholders, as it provided a solid structure on which to construct the local curriculum. However, it was immediately clear to all that in order to make the curriculum relevant to the Maltese context, a degree of refraction was essential. Over the years, the Advanced level syllabus was modified periodically to keep abreast with

local and international issues regarding health, nutrition, consumer, environment and housing. I personally experienced all the changes that occurred in the syllabus in my capacity as a teacher at one of the government Sixth Forms. I was not a member of the syllabus panel at the time but in later years, I was involved and gave my contribution to make the required changes. Significant changes were made to the coursework component, a major challenge for teachers due to volume of work required from their students and the amount of marking that needed to be done. However as a teacher, I used to provide the necessary guidance to help my students present all the required coursework for moderation by the MATSEC Examinations Board. Students used to be overwhelmed with the amount of work that was required to meet the criteria set by the syllabus. In this respect, an Advanced level teacher remarked:

The amount of work required for the coursework changed along the years but it still put enormous pressure on us. [...] We demanded a revision to the syllabus, as it was impossible for the students and for us to produce such a huge amount of work. Both teachers and students were fed up! [Camellia, LHi]

During the MATSEC syllabus panel meetings, the coursework component used to be a key issue of debate. Camellia referred to the issue and remarked:

When we used to meet during Board meetings about the syllabus, some argued that the coursework should be similar to an experiment carried out in Biology or Chemistry O level lessons. But this is not merely a homework task to be brought back within a week. In order to satisfy all the assessment criteria, which by the way are not user-friendly at all, students have to spend more time on it [Camellia, LHi].

My experience related to the coursework and that of my other colleagues proved useful during syllabus panel meetings as we eventually brought about gradual changes to the coursework requirements for Advanced level. However, Sixth Form teachers still felt that the syllabus was not student-friendly enough.

The content of the course of studies was also revised, and what was previously referred to as 'core' paper was renamed 'The Family, Home and Society', which reflected the various topics covered. Over the years, the content covered in the Nutrition paper took a more scientific slant and required candidates to have a good science background in biology and chemistry (MATSEC Examinations Board, 2000b; 2006).

In the latest changes made to the syllabus in 2012, the coursework has been modified to reduce further the amount of work required by the candidates with a subsequent reduction in the share of the final percentage mark from the previous 40% to 25%. A food study task replaced the portfolio, thus requiring less work by students and teachers alike (MATSEC Examinations Board, 2010).

#### **9.4 Conclusion**

The historical development of the syllabi for Home Economics and Textiles Studies throughout the decades is the clearest indication of the strong influence of British pedagogical models on the local approaches to teaching the subjects. However, such models were not adopted without due consideration to local requirements. Goodson and Rudd's concept of refraction (2012) is clearly identifiable in the changes and developments that took place in the Home Economics and Textiles Studies curricula at the macro and micro levels. Different policies were interpreted and contextualised by key players to suit a completely different socio-cultural context. The critical attitude taken by education officials in the decades prior to the introduction of MATSEC paved the way to a smooth transition to local syllabi at all levels which catered for the educational needs of Maltese students.

<b>PRIMARY SCHOOLS (Housecraft and Needlework)</b>			
<b>YEAR</b>		<b>ALTERATIONS TO SYLLABUS</b>	<b>COURSE</b>
<b>1950s</b>	1950/51	Amendments to the Needlework syllabus.	
	1955/56	New syllabi for Housecraft and Domestic Science, including Needlework.	
	1959	New syllabi for Housecraft and Needlework.	
<b>1960s</b>	1965	A revised syllabus for Home Economics (previously referred to as Housecraft) for the senior classes (Standard V and VI).	A five-week training course for primary school teachers to become familiar with the new approach presented in the Home Economics syllabus.
<b>1970s</b>	1970		Orientation courses for prospective Home Economics and Needlework secondary school teachers.
<b>GIRLS' GRAMMAR SCHOOLS AND SECONDARY TECHNICAL SCHOOL (Domestic Science - Housecraft - Home Economics)</b>			
<b>YEAR</b>		<b>ALTERATIONS TO SYLLABUS</b>	<b>COURSE</b>
<b>1950s</b>	1949/50	Amendments to Housecraft (Domestic Science) syllabus of the Secondary Schools.	
<b>1960s</b>	1959/60	A new syllabus for Domestic Science for the girls' grammar schools.	
	1964	Domestic Science/Housecraft in the Grammar School syllabus included two main sections - theory and practical.	
	1965/66	Housecraft syllabi of the Girls' Grammar Schools and the Girls' Secondary Technical School were revised and updated.	
	1966/67	A new syllabus for Housecraft and Cookery for the Girls' Secondary Technical/Girls' Grammar Schools.	
	1967	A new syllabus for Extended Courses in Home Economics, Cookery, Needlework and Dressmaking.	

(Table continues on the following page)

**Table 9.3:** An overview of the changes made to the various syllabi of Home Economics and Textiles Studies over the years, including the related training courses for teachers (Source: Education Department Circulars. Government Reports and subjects' syllabi for the respective schools).



<b>GIRLS' SECONDARY SCHOOL AND GIRLS' JUNIOR LYCEUM (Home Economics)</b>			
<b>YEAR</b>		<b>ALTERATIONS TO SYLLABUS</b>	<b>COURSE</b>
<b>1970s</b>	1970	New syllabus for the New Secondary Schools.	A course held for teachers (July)
		Two revised editions to the 1970 were made during this decade	1974 - Summer vacation course on new pedagogies.  1977 - A course organised for teachers.
	1979	Amendments made to Form V (Group II) syllabus regarding Child Care	Children: A Shared Responsibility (July)
<b>1980s</b>	1981	New syllabus (Group I and Group II) for the Girls' Secondary Schools.	
	1983	Syllabus modifications for Form I - IV at the Girls' Junior Lyceum	
	1986	Revisions made to the 'food and nutrition' section and an amended version of the syllabus was published	A new approach to tackling nutrition problems in Malta through Home Economics (June)
<b>1990s</b>	1993	Modification to syllabus	Home Economics in the service of the community (July).
	1994	A new syllabus for Health Education	Implementing the National Health Education Curriculum Guidelines (July)
	1996	Changes to the syllabus in the Girls' Junior Lyceum and Girls' Secondary Schools.	The Home Economics Curriculum (July)  Working through a Design Brief (September)
	1997	Launch of the new syllabus	Working through a Design Brief (September)
	1998	Modifications to the syllabus	Managing the Changing Syllabus in Home Economics (July)

(Table continues on the following page)

<b>GIRLS' SECONDARY SCHOOL AND GIRLS' JUNIOR LYCEUM (cont. ...)</b> <b>(Home Economics)</b>			
<b>YEAR</b>		<b>ALTERATIONS TO SYLLABUS</b>	<b>COURSES</b>
<b>2000s</b>	2000		Exploring Strategies Examinations and Portfolio Work (July)
	2002		Managing the changes introduced in MATSEC Home Economics Syllabus 2003-2004 (September)
	2003	Revised version of the syllabus.	Current Developments in Home Economics (July)
	2004		Standard in the Learning Outcomes of Home Economics (September)
	2005	Specific editions created for the Junior Lyceum.	Further participation in the review of the Home Economics Programme of study (July)
	2006	Revision and modifications made to the previous edition of the syllabus.	Meeting expectations - the latest development in Home Economics (September)
	2007		The way forward ... in Home Economics (July)
	2008		Exploring key issues in Home Economics (September)
	2009	Newly revised syllabus.	ICT and differentiated teaching in Home Economics (July)
	2010		Exploring teaching/learning strategies to challenge and engage students in the differentiated set-up (September)
<b>2010s</b>	2011	New syllabus created for Form I.	
	2012	New syllabus created for Form II.	
	2013	Revised Form III syllabus.	Form 2 Curriculum - Home Economics (July)
	2014		Assessment Matters (July)

(Table continues on the following page)

<b>GIRLS' GRAMMAR SCHOOLS, SECONDARY TECHNICAL SCHOOL, SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND GIRLS' JUNIOR LYCEUM (Needlework - Needlecraft - Textiles Studies)</b>			
YEAR		ALTERATIONS TO SYLLABUS	COURSES
1950s	1959/60	A redraft of the syllabus for the Girls' Grammar Schools.	
1960s	1963/64	Amendments and alterations to the syllabus in Girls' Grammar Schools.	
	1965/66	The syllabi of Girls' Grammar Schools and the Girls' Secondary Technical School were revised and updated.	
	1967/68	A new syllabus for Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary Technical School and the Girls' Grammar Schools.	
1970s	1970	New syllabus for the new secondary schools.	A course organised for teachers (July).
		A revised edition to the 1970 was made during this decade.	
	1977		A course on embroidery organised teachers
1980s	1981	New syllabus (Group I and Group II) for the Girls' Secondary Schools.	
	1983	Revised syllabus for Forms I and II for the Girls' Secondary Schools.  Syllabus modifications for Form II at the Girls' Junior Lyceum.	
	1985	Revised syllabus for Forms I and II for the Girls' Secondary Schools.	
1990s	1995		Computer Aided Design in Needlecraft (July)
	1996	A new syllabus for the Girls' Junior Lyceum and Girls' Secondary Schools.	
	1997		Managing the Changing Curriculum in Textiles Studies (July)  Working through a Design Brief (September)
	1998	Modifications to the previously published syllabus.	
	1999	Further revisions made to the previous syllabus.	Managing the revised syllabus in Textiles Studies (September)

(Table continues from the previous page)

<b>GIRLS' GRAMMAR SCHOOLS, SECONDARY TECHNICAL SCHOOL, SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND GIRLS' JUNIOR LYCEUM</b> <b>(Needlework - Needlecraft - Textiles Studies) (cont. ...)</b>			
<b>YEAR</b>		<b>ALTERATIONS TO SYLLABUS</b>	<b>COURSE</b>
<b>2000s</b>	2001		Exploring Strategies in examinations and Portfolio Work (September)
	2002		Managing the changes introduced in MATSEC Textiles and Design Syllabus 2003-2004 (July)
	2003	New syllabi were published for the Girls' Junior Lyceum and Girls' Secondary Schools.	Current Developments in Textiles Studies (September)
	2004	Revisions made to the syllabus.	Standard in the Learning Outcomes of Textiles Studies (July)
	2005		Initiating the first process in the revision of the Textiles Studies Syllabus (September)
	2006	Further revisions to the syllabus.	Meeting expectations re the latest developments in Textiles Studies (July)
	2007		Textiles Studies ... and the use of ICT (September)
	2008		Exploring key issues in Textiles Studies (July)
	2009	Revisions to syllabus.	Revised syllabus and differentiated teaching (September)
	2010	Revisions to syllabus.	Exploring proposals and evaluating outcomes in connection with the revised syllabus (July)

(Table continues from the previous page)

<b>GIRLS' GRAMMAR SCHOOLS, SECONDARY TECHNICAL SCHOOL, SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND GIRLS' JUNIOR LYCEUM (Needlework - Needlecraft - Textiles Studies)</b>			
<b>YEAR</b>		<b>ALTERATIONS TO SYLLABUS</b>	<b>COURSES</b>
<b>2010s</b>	2011	New syllabus created for Form I.	
	2012	New syllabus created for Form II.	
	2013		
	2014		Assessment Matters (July)

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **REFLECTIONS ON THE FINDINGS**

#### **10.0 Introduction**

The development of domestic subjects in Malta in the fifty years spanning from 1960 to 2010 was heavily influenced by the island's political and socio-economic changes. The tiny Mediterranean archipelago of Malta experienced a dramatic transformation from being a British fortress colony to becoming an independent state, a member of the Commonwealth and of the European Union. Sovereignty required a different approach to policy-making in many fields, including education. After independence, colonial models in education were less strictly adhered to, but were taken as a basis on which to construct more pertinent, local models. The change in strategy can be clearly seen in the evolution of domestic subjects, Home Economics and Textiles Studies, due to their practical nature and their immediate relevance to family life and to a developing society in general. The subjects were seen as an important tool for the improvement of the Maltese people's quality of life, which was still considerably low when compared to the more advanced European nations. Since the subjects were meant to have an impact on family life, curriculum design and education policy had to take into account factors such as religion, customs and other long-standing beliefs that were not pertinent for most other academically oriented subjects. Localisation was essential to keep the subjects relevant and to achieve the socio-economic goals envisaged by the authorities. However, the subjects' strong link to the practical requirements of society also meant that they had to evolve at the same pace as society itself. The fact that Malta experienced such a rapid development in the last decades of the twentieth century put Home Economics and Textiles Studies under great pressure to constantly redefine themselves and maintain their relevance, while being under risk of losing their place in the school curriculum to emerging subjects. The data collected for this study shows how these challenges emerged and were dealt with by the different stakeholders, but also highlights how the evolution of these subjects in Malta shared some common elements with what happened in other countries, both in respect to domestic subjects and to other vocational or practically-oriented disciplines.

### **10.1 Colonial influence on the subjects' curricula and the process of refraction**

The Maltese colonial experience under British rule was a key aspect in how the subjects' curricula were constructed, reconstructed and developed. Other former British colonies, especially Hong Kong and Australia, experienced the same influence on their domestic studies curricula (Pendergast, 2001; Yung Chan, 2005; Ma and Pendergast, 2011). The British education system served as a model for the colonies, allowing for a process of refraction, whereby the British model was modified according to each country's socio-cultural and economic context. It is only in recent years that the Maltese education authorities began exploring other overseas education systems, to consider strategies developed in other countries that could be better tailored to the Maltese system. As already mentioned, practical subjects such as Home Economics and Textiles Studies are closely linked to the social context, thus requiring changes in their curricula to keep pace with changes in society. Along the decades, educational policy was constantly updated to follow the developments that took place in other countries, particularly in Britain and the US, but was devised keeping in mind the specific socio-cultural values of the Maltese people. This is why, for instance, the Maltese syllabi for Housecraft and Needlework followed very closely the syllabi offered by British examination boards, with only minor modifications applied to cater for the local scene. This process of refraction was not always possible for various reasons. Costs and economies of scale, for example, had an impact on resources, which in turn influenced certain pedagogical aspects specific to practical subjects. Given the financial impossibility of producing local textbooks, British textbooks are still being used today, albeit less strictly adhered to than in the past. Moreover, the specialist rooms, such as the Domestic Science/Housecraft flat/flatlet-were smaller and modified according to space and resources available. The same policy applied to examinations until the establishment of the local examination system in the 1990s. Maltese students sat for British examinations, but the papers for Maltese candidates were modified according to the local curriculum.

Another important aspect of refraction was the input given by British visiting lecturers at the Mater Admirabilis Teachers' Training College and by the Maltese teachers who followed courses in the UK. These British-trained professionals introduced the latest pedagogical trends and teaching material to the teachers and trainees of domestic subjects, who in turn applied them in schools. Many of those who studied abroad

acquired higher teaching/administrative posts at the Education Department and part-time lecturing posts at the Faculty of Education, thus being in a position to introduce innovations in the subjects' curricula.

## **10.2 The evolution of the Home Economics and Textiles Studies as school subjects**

The way Home Economics and Textiles Studies evolved in the Maltese education system can be analysed in the light of Layton's model on the development of school subjects. The data collected for this study shows that most descriptors highlighted by Layton's three-tiered historical model (Layton, 1972) are applicable to both subjects.

In the first stage of his model, Layton's model identified novelty and utility as the reasons why subjects are introduced in the school curriculum. In the case of Needlework in 1858 and Domestic Economy in 1909, utility was the key factor that induced the education authorities to introduce the subjects in the curriculum. Both subjects were particularly relevant to the requirements of Maltese society, which was characterised by widespread poverty and lack of education in fields such as hygiene, nutrition and general provision for family needs. Although lessons were limited only to a few hours per week, non-academically inclined students showed great interest in the subjects, recognising their potential in giving them skills for their future role as mothers and providing them with prospective paths for employment. The students' favourable reaction tallies with Layton's view that in the initial stage, 'learners are attracted to the subject because of its bearing on matters of concern to them' (Layton, 1972, p. 11). During the 1960s, Home Economics and Textiles Studies were at their peak, in terms of popularity and status. Teachers and students in schools such as Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary Technical did exceptional work, promoting the subjects and attracting respect from parents and the education authorities. In fact, this enthusiasm was generally limited to those girls who did not have any academic inclination. Evidence from the research conducted through documentary analysis and the teachers' interviews showed that during the 1950s and 1960s, most grammar school girls considered the subjects to be of low academic status and useless for their future careers. In the first stage of evolution, Layton also mentioned the lack of trained subject specialists and the enthusiasm of the first wave of teachers. Prior to 1960, Maltese teachers of domestic subjects did not receive any formal training. Some of those interviewed for this study stated that although teachers were untrained prior to



the launching of the teacher training course at Mater Admirabilis, they were very dedicated and enthusiastic in teaching proper skills related to Housecraft and Needlework to their students.

In the second stage of his model, Layton emphasised the development of scholarly work by trained specialists in the field. Academic research in the fields of Home Economics and Textiles Studies was not carried out in Malta until very recently, due to a lack of scholars, resources, access to foreign research in the pre-internet era, and publishing opportunities. However, after 1962, the first cohort of subject specialists qualified from the teacher's college. Along the years, there emerged a group of committed trained specialists, and some furthered their studies at masters and doctoral level in Home Economics and Textiles Studies. In 1978, the subjects started being offered as specialisation fields in the Bachelor of Education course at the University of Malta. This crucial stage of the subjects' evolution took the subjects to a new dimension, strengthening their higher status, justifying their claims for improved resources and enticing students to pursue a career in the fields, following a trend identified by Goodson (1988) for other subjects in the UK.

In the third and final stage of his model, Layton mentions the establishment of subject associations to support the professional body and the important role played by subject specialists in determining the subject's contents. This stage of evolution is identifiable in the context under study, since by 1974, fourteen years after formal teacher training courses were offered for prospective teachers of Home Economics and Textiles Studies, a Maltese subjects' association, HENTA, (and later HEiA) was established. HENTA and HEiA organised several seminars and workshops for their members, and on a number of occasions intervened to safeguard the interests of the teachers and the future of the subjects. Moreover, ever since the 1960s, the Inspectress/Education Officer, the HoDs and the University lecturers were entrusted with the design of the school-based and national curricula (SEC, Intermediate and Advanced level) respectively. It is still common practice for the Education Officer and the HoDs to liaise with teachers to improve the subjects' curricula, using the in-service courses as a forum for discussion. Teachers as practitioners are given the important role of testing the curriculum when innovative pedagogies and new subject content are introduced, in order to provide feedback and improve the curriculum.

Layton also identified the dwindling interest of students who form part of the cohort of students studying the subject as one of the characteristics of the third stage of his model. In this case, Home Economics and Textiles Studies followed diverging trends. The overall number of students opting for Home Economics in secondary schools increased during the period under study because of a number of factors that increased its relevance to various groups of students, namely the opening of the subjects to males, and the inclusion of the subject among the requirements for admission to courses at ITS and MCAST. In some instances, however, the number of Home Economics students opting for the subject fluctuated due to the influence of some career guidance teachers who have a low opinion of the subject, and the introduction of new subjects on the school curriculum. On the other hand, Textiles Studies is moving in the direction described by Layton. In recent years, the subject has been experiencing a decline in students due to its diminishing relevance to students' needs, to bleak career prospects and to competition from emerging subjects.

The evolution of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta is inextricably linked to their relevance for society at large. When their subject content was deemed useful to the improvement of society in various ways, from providing domestic skills to girls to forming suitably qualified recruits for various industrial sectors, the subjects enjoyed a high status. They were promoted and supported by the authorities, enthusiastically taught by teachers, and they were sought by parents and students for the concrete benefits they could provide. However, as mentioned above, practical and vocational subjects are especially dependent on their own relevance, which can change suddenly due to many different factors. For this reason, throughout the decades, both Home Economics and Textiles Studies have faced a continuous struggle to keep their status and strove to remain relevant in a rapidly changing society. The subjects' community has been called many times to react to emerging threats from various quarters. The major issues have always revolved around the subjects' value, as defined by their socio-economic relevance. According to their relevance at any particular point in time, which was determined by the specific needs and prevalent beliefs of society, the subjects enjoyed a higher or lower status in the curriculum. Whenever relevance diminished, the subjects' community was compelled to redefine the disciplines in order to give them new value.

### **10.3 The value of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in the Maltese curriculum**

The evidence gathered from archival documents and the narratives of teachers showed that the value of the subjects underwent important changes over the fifty years under scrutiny. Such value emerged from the attitudes towards the subjects expressed by the stakeholders involved directly and indirectly in the teaching and learning of the subjects. Different socio-economic conditions, governmental and educational policies and expectations by teachers and students (including the latter's parents who influence their children's subject choices at lower levels) brought about changes in attitude that had an impact on the subjects' school curriculum.

In the 1960s, the Maltese government's efforts to improve local quality of life were reflected in the efforts made by the education authorities to enhance the teaching of both Home Economics (then known as Domestic Science or Housecraft) and Textiles Studies (then known as Needlework or Needlecraft). Although they had already been established in primary and secondary schools, the education authorities wanted to ensure good quality in the teaching and learning of the subjects. For this reason, both subjects were included as areas of specialisation at Mater Admirabilis Women's Teacher Training College (Curmi, n.d.), and the education authorities provided the necessary resources to promote further domestic and practical education for female students in primary and secondary schools. This was achieved through the establishment of the Maria Assumpta Girls' Secondary Technical School (1959), the school of Our Lady of Joy (1966), the extended courses for post primary students (1967), and the 'practical classes' for girls in primary schools (1963 onwards). In these years, the value given to the subjects by all stakeholders was considerably high, as demonstrated by the teachers' and students' vivid recollections of the various activities that were held in these schools. However, the attempts made by the education authorities to increase the value of Home Economics/Housecraft and Needlework even in a highly academic environment such as that of the grammar schools were not as successful (RwDE 1960). The aim of providing the students with some skills related to needlework and housecraft apart from academic knowledge was not accompanied by measures to guarantee the availability of the necessary resources for the teachers to implement the practical approach, which was a strong element in the subjects' syllabi of the 1960s (see chapter 6). Therefore, the teachers found themselves forced to focus

on theory, effectively preventing the students from appreciating the value of the subjects given by the policymakers themselves, who wanted the girls to obtain some practical skills in their education apart from purely academic knowledge (RwDE 1961). Archival documents showed that this situation did not help to improve the popularity and value of the subjects among grammar school girls, who were very academically oriented and gave little value to vocational careers.

In the early 1970s, a new government policy providing Needlework and Home Economics education for girls in Forms I and II in all secondary schools brought about an added value to the subjects. The education authorities provided the necessary financial assistance to establish well-equipped subject rooms for the practical teaching of these subjects in all secondary schools, bringing about more vacancies for teachers who in turn found a career opportunity in these areas when choosing their areas of specialisation at the Training College. The teaching of the practical component, which according to the participants' narratives was one of the subjects' best assets along the years, proved very popular with students who were not exclusively focused on pursuing a professional career. Many also chose to continue to study the subjects in the senior years at secondary school. By the late 1970s, the education authorities appreciated the focus on the practical approach in these subjects and found them to be also appropriate for lower ability students, in order to provide them with necessary life skills (RwGD April – December 1979).

The vocational value of the subjects was further enhanced in the 1970s, when the Maltese government devised policies that focused specifically on improving the economic situation of the country through the creation of a skilled, labour-intensive workforce. The value of Needlecraft as a subject conducive to employment in the manufacturing sector increased its value in the girls' trade schools established in the early 1970s. These schools provided a curriculum based on textiles-related crafts, and in later years also saw the introduction of Home Economics. The education authorities emphasised the need for providing the necessary skills to the less academically oriented female students for them to find employment in the manufacturing industry which boomed in the 1970s and 1980s (RwGD July 1973 – June 1974).

Several changes in the Maltese education system introduced in the 1980s, however, had a negative impact on the subjects. In 1981, the abolition of comprehensive

schooling and the adoption of the tripartite system prompted the elimination of Home Economics and Needlework as compulsory subjects in the first two years of secondary school education. The reason given by the education authorities for this measure was that they wanted to provide a common curriculum for boys and girls, and since Home Economics and Needlework were only intended for females, the subjects were left out (DEdF, No. 400/72). In this case, the value of the subjects was given secondary importance with respect to gender equality in education. This resulted in several teachers being made redundant due to the decrease in the number of students choosing the subjects, and who were assigned to teach other disciplines.

However, this setback in the development of Home Economics and Needlework was soon offset by another policy change. The new policy introduced in 1990 by the government following the Education Act of 1988 was the provision of equal education opportunities for both sexes. This brought about a shift in the value of Home Economics, which passed from being considered as pertaining exclusively to the female domain to be seen as a possible career path for both males and females. The education authorities perceived the value of introducing Home Economics as an option for boys in secondary schools as a means to improve their vocational skills related to the hospitality industry. The introduction of the subject in the school curriculum of boys brought about a stronger emphasis on the utilitarian value of the subject during the 1990s and the decade that followed. In the years following the introduction of Home Economics in the curriculum for boys, the value that was accorded by male students to the subject as a means of providing them with the necessary vocational skills to proceed to the Institute of Tourism Studies was evident by its boost in popularity in secondary schools. The number of male candidates who sat for the SEC examination in Home Economics in the first years of the present century (see Table 7.1) shows that male students responded well to this innovation. The data obtained from the participants' narratives and the focus groups attested to the positive response that was given by parents during parents' days, and the enthusiasm showed by students. The participants who were teaching at the time highlighted the teachers' initial scepticism, but they also pointed out how the value of the subject increased considerably among male students and posed new challenges for the teachers, who on their part realised their opportunity to assert their presence in boys' schools as well.

Further added value given to Home Economics was not only its inclusion among the nationally examinable subjects at the various levels (SEC in 1993, Intermediate in 2003 and Advanced level in 1996), but also its presence in the University of Malta's Faculty of Education program as a subject area of specialisation as from 1978. The statistical data and the participants' narratives show that since the late 1970s Home Economics has proved to be an attractive option and kept a steady flow of students undertaking the course, with some also proceeding to post-graduate study in the area. At the turn of the century, the value of Home Economics both as an academic subject and as a vocational path became stable despite concerns about the subject's way forward, mostly held by teachers and academics who still remember past struggles and are keen to avoid a new crisis for Home Economics in the ever-changing education scenario in Malta.

The value of Needlework/Textiles Studies experienced a constant decline starting in the 1980s. Although since the late nineteenth century Needlework had been considered a provider of important skills for the domestic and (later) industrial needs of the Maltese population, the subject began to decline when the socio-economic conditions changed. As priorities changed, policymakers did not give Needlework the importance it previously enjoyed, while students opted for other subjects, as shown by the data concerning the number of students opting for the subject and of those sitting for the subject at SEC level. The changes made to the subject's syllabus, including its name change to Textiles Studies in 1997, did not halt this decline. The diminished relevance of the subject in the eyes of parents and students, reported in the participants' narratives and the TS focus group, produced inevitable consequences; there was a decrease in demand, the number of Textiles Studies teachers decreased, and the education authorities did not replace those who retired. According to the life history narratives, in the years following 2000 education administrators lamented that there were no professionally trained teachers in the field, choosing to ignore the fact that Home Economics graduates are also qualified to teach Textiles Studies. New subjects that could possibly offer better career prospects are pushing their way into the curriculum, as Textile Studies struggles for survival in search of a new value.

#### **10.4 Status and significance**

An analysis of the historical roots of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in various countries revealed that these subjects experienced an on-going struggle for legitimisation (Pendergast, 2001). At times, this was due to internal challenges which involved the members of the subjects' community. However, significant influence on the status accorded to the disciplines was also due to external factors.

Following the shift in Western social values that put the link between women and domesticity in a negative light, the name 'Home Economics' became a hindrance to the appreciation of the discipline and lowered its status in the curriculum. A new, comprehensive definition was required in order to provide a clear understanding of its content and prevent misinterpretations by stakeholders such as policymakers, parents and students. Over the years, academics made various attempts to provide an appropriate definition, striving to move away from the original emphasis on the domestic domain. The most recent definition of Home Economics, included in the IFHE position statement of 2008, states that Home Economics 'is a field of study and a profession, situated in the human sciences that draws from a range of disciplines to achieve optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families and communities' (p. 1). The definition moves the field away from gender bias and stresses its scientific and interdisciplinary nature. It shifts emphasis from the traditional domestic setting to personal and collective well-being, in an effort to recoup its relevance in society and increase its value as a discipline and area of specialisation.

In the years when Malta was still emerging from the effects of colonial rule, from the mid-Sixties to the end of the Eighties, the social structure was founded on the family unit, and the struggling economy was based on the textile and the hospitality industries. Consequently, the practical and vocational aspect of Home Economics and Textiles Studies was particularly relevant to society's needs. Policymakers, parents and students appreciated the subjects' value and held them in high consideration. However, the socio-economic changes that occurred in Maltese society in the 1990s, ranging from the role of women to gender equality, from foreign cultural influences on lifestyle to the development of the economy, put into question the relevance of Home Economics and Textiles Studies, their value and their place in the curriculum. Since then, the subjects' community has been striving to redefine the fields with special

emphasis on their local relevance, while changing their syllabi and pedagogies to conform with the requirements and values of society and with the significant changes carried out in the Maltese school curriculum.

Many international studies (e.g., Yung Chan, 2005) have shown that the status of Home Economics was a determining factor that influenced its development. As has been shown in this study, the curricula of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta experienced a constant shift, similar to what Pendergast called a ‘chameleon-like transformation’ (2001, p. 4), in order to improve their status. One of the main reasons for this continuous change in status is due to their interdisciplinary nature which allows them to be shaped, moulded and re-sculptured according to social, historical, political and economic conditions. The flexible characteristics of the subjects have often been used or abused according to the introduction of or changes in different educational policies. On many occasions, Home Economics and Textiles Studies were internally and externally manipulated in an attempt to conform to patterns, often dictated by those in dominant positions of power, as a means to improve their status and to acquire significance and value. The struggle for acceptance generated internal reforms, which took place especially in America and Britain, had a direct impact on the disciplines in other countries, including Malta. In addition, the subjects’ communities and associations also struggled to ensure survival for their fields, albeit with little evidence of success in many US states and in Britain. A number of campaigns were made in Malta by the subjects’ community and their association, in an attempt to obtain legitimation and improve the status of the subjects in schools and beyond. They lobbied to make the subjects compulsory for all students in the first two years of secondary school, to devise more academically-oriented curricula rather than focus on practical-skills, to establish Home Economics for boys and to rename and rebrand the subjects. Some of these attempts to legitimise both field of studies were unfruitful, while others were successful and led to an improvement in status. However, the deep-rooted image and negative perceptions of many Maltese people towards Home Economics and Textiles Studies still exists, although less than in the past, and the subjects’ presence in the school curricula remains continuously challenged and threatened.



The problem of definition of Home Economics and Textiles Studies still persists. As Pendergast (2001) argued, throughout its long history, Home Economics has never shown its true colours, which aim to promote sustainable well-being in society. Rebranding is a way of improving the status of subjects and of removing the stereotypical perceptions long attached to them. The process of rebranding is beneficial for the acquisition of a new identity and improvement of subject content and pedagogies (Malokwu, 2010). Renaming disciplines is one way of seeking legitimization, but the Maltese experience shows that name changes done over the years did not reach the desired outcome. This was due to the absence of a wide-ranging rebranding process and marketing campaign. In Malta, name change was not always accompanied by corresponding changes in the curriculum content, especially in the case of Textiles Studies. This phenomenon had also occurred in Britain and the US (Attar, 1990). The 'language game' (Pendergast, 2001) in Malta was more focused on finding an appropriate name that clearly defines the discipline, rather than on attempting to change the content in order to provide a new identity and new value. If a change in content had been made, better results in perception change and status improvement in the school curriculum would have been achieved.

An opportunity to acquire a higher status for Home Economics and Textiles Studies among school subjects was provided by the NMC in 1990, which aimed at achieving a gender-neutral curriculum. The reform provided an opportunity to offer Home Economics to boys in secondary schools. In order to assert its relevance, Home Economics started being marketed for its vocational aspect rather than for its usefulness for everyday living. Its utilitarian value was considerable for those male students who intended to find employment in the hospitality industry.

However, while it was promoting the vocational aspect of Home Economics to enhance the subjects' value for boys, the subjects' community decreased its practical component, which had traditionally been the backbone and main attraction of both Home Economics and Textiles Studies. The move was prompted by the community's eagerness to obtain academic status for the disciplines. The reduction of the practical component corresponded to an increase in theory and the introduction of coursework as a mode of assessment, which focused on decision-making and problem-solving rather than on practical skills. In terms of content and pedagogies, the innovations

intended to promote the subjects as academic fields of study. The changes were not universally approved of by the teachers, who acknowledged the need for Home Economics to acquire academic status, but were aware that relevance to social needs was crucial to guarantee the subject's survival.

Struggles over the subjects' boundaries were another recurring issue that threatened the status and relevance of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in the school curriculum. The NMC in 1990 introduced new subjects such as D&T and PSD, a move which created tension between the Home Economics and Textiles Studies community and the education authorities. These new subjects were perceived as a threat under various aspects, and gave rise to situations that Goodson referred to as 'border wars' (1997, p. 113). The issues focused on subject content, since some topics in PSD and D&T overlapped with those of Home Economics and Textiles Studies. According to Bernstein (1996), the maintenance of boundaries among subjects is important as it perpetuates the relations of power between the different subjects, and in such a situation, as Goodson (1997) observed, practical and low status subjects tend to be the ones that are challenged. These have to constantly defend, define and redefine their boundaries. The multidisciplinary nature of Home Economics and Textiles Studies, the difficulty to provide a clear definition of the disciplines and their perceived low status due to their practical slant, resulted in the creation of blurred boundaries which gave rise to claims over content by other subjects. The narratives of some of this study's participants provide vivid descriptions of the tensions felt by teachers over these subjects' territories. Some even argued that outside perception was that the utilitarian aspect of Home Economics and Textiles Studies was out-dated, and that the subjects were not necessary for better living, so their place on the timetable should be taken by other subjects. In other words, the relevance and value of the subjects were being put into question. As Goodson observed, 'the promotion of new curriculum areas threatens existing subject territories' (1997, p. 113). As practical subjects, Home Economics and Textiles Studies are at a disadvantage and their community finds it harder to convince policymakers who are influenced by lobbying groups of newer or higher status academic disciplines. The difficulties faced by the subjects' community in Malta were similar to those observed in Hong Kong by Yung Chan (2005). Home Economics tends to be submissive to the challenges made by the higher authorities instead of striving to preserve their gained status.

### **10.5 Status and resource allocation**

The relationship between status and material, economic and human resources was evident in various stages of the subjects' development. Some forms of knowledge, especially those with a strong academic tradition, tend to gain more legitimization on status and resources (Goodson, 1983). Historically, most resources were allocated to high status subjects that were more academically-oriented and catered mostly for able students (Byrne, 1974). Consequently, subjects that are granted a high status and are considered part of the 'academic tradition' tend to acquire more resources than those that have a lower status, generally associated with the 'utilitarian tradition' (Goodson, 1983), since lower status subjects are usually thought to attract less able students due to their practical and vocational/technical orientation (Purvis, 1985). As previously seen, domestic subjects fit perfectly in the utilitarian tradition. However practical subjects require a considerable amount of investment in order to implement the proper pedagogies, and domestic subjects are no exception. In the Maltese context, whereas academic subjects easily obtained the necessary resources, Home Economics and Textiles Studies had to endure long negotiations to acquire the basic resources they required, such as properly equipped facilities and funds for practical work.

Although a range of resources were allocated to the subjects' teachers, documentary evidence revealed that these were often limited and that some courses and programmes could not be implemented due to lack of funds. Participants in this study who taught at senior primary school during the 1960s highlighted the difficulties encountered in their work due to the limited resources available. At a time when Malta was still building its economy as an independent state, financial resources were scarce. Public education administrators had to identify priorities according to the government's wider policies to spend their department's allocation, and subjects requiring greater investment in resources were under pressure to make the most with what they were given. Home Economics and Textiles Studies benefitted from aid provided by UNICEF and FAO in the form of material and human resources, greatly improving the situation with respect of equipment, books and teacher-training. Moreover, the UNESCO-funded Girls' Secondary Technical School proved a boost for domestic education. The status of domestic subjects in that institution increased to an unprecedented level, although, in certain periods, subject teachers experienced a shortage of funds for the practical component.

When D&T was introduced after 2000, a ‘barrier war’ for resources ensued with Home Economics and Textiles Studies. The government offered full financial and logistical support for the smooth introduction of D&T in schools. The specialist rooms of Home Economics and Textiles Studies were refurbished and transformed to suit the needs of the new subject. The education authorities argued that both Home Economics and Textiles Studies were to gain with the introduction of D&T, as the ‘run-down’ rooms became ‘state of the art’ laboratories. Many interviewees in this study were critical of the design and layout of the new Home Economics rooms, which became known as Food Labs. These teachers’ fears regarding subject boundaries were not allayed by the refurbishment of their specialist rooms. As a new subject, D&T had the full backing of the authorities and was promoted at the expense of other vocational disciplines. It was seen as much more relevant to society’s needs and was given a high value. Consequently, Home Economics and Textiles Studies had to redefine themselves to face D&T’s stiff competition in the curriculum.

#### **10.6 Status and examinable knowledge**

Low status subjects consistently pursue improvements in their status by ‘enhancing academic examinations and qualifications’ (Goodson 1983, p. 32), in an effort to be perceived at par with academic subjects. There is a link between examinations, examinable knowledge and school subjects, and examination structures exert an influence on subject status (Goodson, 1983; 1998). Teachers and subjects’ associations aspire for their subjects to be included in the list of examinable subjects. Domestic subjects in Malta have been included in the list of examinable subjects since the introduction of GCE examinations offered by the University of Oxford Delegacy of Examinations in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although they were part of the list, their status was hampered by the small number of students sitting for the examinations, especially at the time when only students from grammar schools sat for GCE examinations in these subjects. Measures were taken to improve the poor level of the candidates, including modifications to the syllabus and an increase in resources. The number of students who obtained qualifications in these subjects increased when better-prepared students from the Girls’ Secondary Technical School started taking the examinations. The success rate in GCE examinations reflected the high status given to domestic subjects at that school.

The establishment of the local examination system in 1989, and the creation of the SEC syllabi for Home Economics and Textiles Studies in 1995, were a boost for the subjects and the subjects' community. Their acceptance in the list of examinable subjects constituted an important acknowledgement of their academic status. Most of the subjects offered by the University of Oxford Delegacy of Examinations at Ordinary and Advanced level were included in MATSEC, the local examination system. However, Home Economics/Dress and Fabrics, which corresponded to Textiles Studies, was excluded from the list of Advanced level exams. This omission had negative consequences that were felt for many years, and which resulted in a dwindling number of students opting for the subject and taking the examination at SEC level. Its inclusion among the list of examinable subjects would have established it as a 'discipline with sufficient rigour' (Goodson, 1983, p. 39). The acceptance of Home Economics and the elimination of Textiles Studies from the list of Advanced level subjects brought to a divergence in the status level of these subjects. Home Economics managed to improve its status and gained an identity as an academic subject with interesting career prospects, while Textiles Studies began a decline in status that continued in the following years. However, there were other issues that brought about changes in the status of the subjects. When Home Economics was offered to boys, the number of students sitting for the subject at SEC level increased and further boosted the subject's popularity in sixth forms, although the number of male students taking the subject at Advanced level was quite low. The failure of Textiles Studies to establish its place on the list of examinable subjects at Advanced level had further consequences. Since Textiles Studies provided no further academic qualifications for students who chose it at SEC level and who aspired for a career in the field, the number of students choosing the option in secondary schools was very low, resulting in a decrease in the numbers of candidates sitting for the T&D (Textiles Studies) SEC examination. In turn, this brought about a shortage of trained teachers in secondary schools. Despite the NFCS education degree course at University provides a considerable number of study units on textiles, the main focus remains on Home Economics. In the coming years, the subject will no longer form part of the secondary school curriculum and will be removed from the list of examinable subjects. It shall be replaced by a vocational subject called Textiles and Fashion.

### **10.7 Status and material interests of Home Economics and Textiles Studies teachers**

Teachers' material and ideological interests are influenced by the status that their subject acquires at different educational institutions. However, if a subject acquires a low status at a particular level, it also tends to see its status diminish at other levels. School subjects traditionally aspire to academic status and to gain a foothold at university (Goodson, 1983; Goodson and Anstead, 1994). Domestic subjects were no exception. Needlework and Housecraft managed to achieve university status decades after they were first introduced in schools. As already mentioned, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the subjects were seen as having a solely utilitarian value, and there was no intention of transforming them into academic disciplines. The subjects fulfilled their assigned role and were valued for it accordingly. However, once specialised teachers in the subjects started graduating from Mater Admirabilis Women's Training College in the 1960s, the status of domestic subjects increased. Older participants of this study suggested that as the quality of the subject teachers improved, domestic subjects gained popularity among students and consideration among the other stakeholders.

When a subject achieves academic status, teachers benefit in terms of career prospects, promotions, better pay and resources (Goodson, 1983). Among the students who formed part of the first cohorts of graduates from Mater Admirabilis Teacher Training College, some continued their studies abroad and eventually took up part-time lecturing posts at the College and later at university. Others were promoted to HoDs or coordinators of the subjects, thus improving their working conditions and financial package. The subjects' academic status was strengthened further when, in the 1970s, they were included in the list of subjects offered for an education degree at the University of Malta. A group of scholars was formed, and began guiding undergraduates in research projects that led to a wide range of dissertations in both Home Economics and Textiles Studies, thus definitively justifying the subjects' claim to academic status.

### **10.8 Social values and the gender issue in domestic subjects**

For many decades, the Housecraft and Needlework curricula used in Maltese schools supported patriarchal values, as they focused on the hestian/private sphere (Thompson,

1992). These subjects have ‘a history of compliance with patriarchal demands that extends back to [...] [their] very origins’ (Pendergast and McGregor, 2007, p. 6). This issue has dominated the content of the curriculum in various countries for many years, and the acceptance of patriarchal ideology as the dominant social value led to the subjects being associated with females, the home and unpaid work (Pendergast, 2001). As a Catholic, Mediterranean island, Malta was not an exception to this rule.

The relationship between policy-making in Maltese education and the dominant patriarchal ideology has always been very close (Darmanin, 1992). Official documents and reports of the early 1900s depicted females as second class citizens whose main duties were to stay at home, be good housewives and bear children (see for instance, RwDG 1930-31). This outlook was instrumental in giving domestic subjects enough value to be taught in Maltese schools. The subjects were introduced to fulfil the needs of Maltese society, ‘to create better domestic servants; to instil a sense of well-being within family life and to create better maintained households’, as well as to make female students more accustomed to domestic/manual work (Portelli, 1996, p. 50). For many decades, girls were expected to marry at a very young age and start a family, then to take care of the family home for the rest of their life. The education authorities sought to improve the well-being of Maltese families through the teaching of Domestic Science/Housecraft and Needlework. The subjects were considered so useful that they were also included in the curriculum of the girls’ grammar schools, although they were unpopular with the academically-inclined girls who attended those institutions. The establishment of the Housecraft School in the 1930s and the teaching of Housecraft and Needlework in elementary schools were significant in providing a domestic and practical bias to the girls’ curriculum. This bias was further strengthened by the establishment of the Girls’ Secondary Technical School, which promoted practical subjects, including Housecraft and Needlework. The role of the skilful and well-organised housewife was still greatly emphasised in the Housecraft/Home Economics curriculum of the 1960s and 1970s, stressing the need for an organised household and to satisfy the needs of different family members. During these decades, the general patriarchal values promoted by the education authorities benefitted the subjects as their popularity with parents, students and the general public increased. The subjects’ gender bias, which was to be so damaging to the status of the disciplines in later years, was their greatest value.

Although Maltese society expected women to stay at home after marriage, young unmarried girls were encouraged to seek employment to contribute to the islands' economy. During the 1950s and 1960s, the aspiration of most girls studying in grammar schools and of some attending the Girls' Secondary Technical was to seek employment as nurses, secretaries or teachers. Some of the girls who came from a middle-class background and studied domestic subjects either aspired to a teaching career or an occupation in the Civil Service, while those working-class girls who opted for the subjects were more inclined to find work as domestic servants and baby-sitters, working with affluent Maltese and families of the British military garrison. As Darmanin (1992) argued, 'the official ideology of education saw the wage labour of females as a natural extension of their domestic role in the home' (p. 106).

The restructuring of the Maltese education system during the 1960s through to the 1980s provided the much needed skilled, labour-intensive workforce that was essential for the islands' economic development. The Housecraft School, the secondary technical schools and the trade schools were established in response to major economic crises with the technical and financial assistance of international agencies. The curricula of these schools were planned according to the requirements of Malta's employment sector, especially the hospitality, manufacturing and the paramedical sectors. Domestic subjects featured prominently in the curricula of vocational courses, namely those offered by the Housecraft School and the school of Our Lady of Joy during the 1960s. The training provided by these schools was purposely intended to cater for the various occupations in the hospitality industry and to help prospective female workers acquire the necessary domestic-related skills to find employment.

A teaching career was another attractive option for female students (Darmanin, 1992), despite the limitations imposed on married women mainly during the 1960s and 1970s. The requirement for women to relinquish employment after marriage had direct implications on domestic subjects, since they were mainly oriented towards female students. The cohort of domestic subject teachers was exclusively female, so this policy effectively deprived the subjects of trained and experienced teachers resulting in a waste of valuable human resources. It also prevented an overall improvement of teaching standards acquired through experience. Gender equality was still an alien



value to Maltese society, and local education continued to promote patriarchal values long after social values had radically changed overseas.

Abroad, however, things were very different. During the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the Home Economics curriculum in the US and Britain was targeted by feminists for maintaining a traditional, stereotypical perspective of the position of women in society. Even in later years, the issue was still being discussed by scholars. Attar (1990), for example, condemned the teaching of Home Economics in British schools, maintaining that the subject is ‘built on the concepts of subordination and of the separate sphere of ‘home’ as the site of family life and female labour’ (p. 147). Maltese women’s organisations failed to take the cue from foreign feminists, as their main focus was the emancipation of women rather than the highly gendered school curriculum (Darmanin, 1992). The accusation that domestic subjects reinforce patriarchal ideology and create stereotypes was never fully accepted by the international or the Maltese subjects’ community. For many years, the perspective mentioned by Attar was taken by the Maltese education authorities to be a positive attribute. In recent decades, however, social changes and foreign influence brought a shift in social values, and the Home Economics curriculum was re-designed to be more gender neutral. The policies of the education authorities became more focused on gender equality and equal opportunity, but although this shift required a redefinition of the role of Home Economics and Textiles Studies, it opened new possibilities of development. In 1992, the subjects became an option choice for boys, and the opening of career prospects related to Home Economics and Textiles Studies rendered the disciplines more attractive to students of both genders. The most recent Home Economics curriculum (2012) gave more emphasis to gender equality and aimed to ‘identify the changing roles and shared responsibilities of different family members and identify ways how to foster positive family relationships and nurture the practice of gender equality’ (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education – Curriculum Management and eLearning Department, 2012, p. 30-31). Although the Maltese subjects’ curricula have made huge leaps forward in terms of gender equality, however, further action must be taken to reconfigure the content to eliminate residues of patriarchal ideology from the syllabi.

### **10.9 Recent developments**

From 2014, new policies implemented by the education authorities had a direct impact

on the future of the disciplines. These policies were the result of the introduction of the NCF which saw the elimination of Home Economics and Textiles Studies as options for Forms I and II in state secondary schools. Home Economics was initially merged into a subject called Physical and Health Education, but later regained recognition as a separate subject and is now referred to it as Home Economics within the Health and Physical Learning Area. A curriculum was specifically designed to cater for a shorter cycle of 13 weeks, compulsory for all students starting Form I in 2014-15. Although this compulsory course in Home Economics is non-examinable, a 'learners' folio' has to be compiled by every student and assessed by the subject teacher. Home Economics still remains an optional examinable subject for students in Form III.

Textiles Studies has been completely eliminated both from the first two years of secondary schooling and as an area known as Textile Technology, within Design and Technology. In the coming years, its future in the middle school is doomed as it shall be replaced by a new vocational subject called Textiles and Fashion. Currently, the Ministry of Education and Employment has embarked on an EU co-funded project to complement the NCF, for curriculum experts to develop Learning Outcomes Framework and Learning and Assessment Programmes for the different year groups. It was decided that Textiles Studies in schools should be replaced by a vocational subject with the aim of attracting more students and providing a different career pathway for those opting for it. This was a sudden and unexpected change for the Textiles Studies community, as there was no indication of a change in the Directorate's policy. It shall be a sad end for a subject with a long curriculum history, the first domestic subject to be introduced and taught to girls in schools, both locally and overseas.

At tertiary level, a major restructuring process is currently underway at the Faculty of Education, which is undertaking a significant change in the nature of Initial Teacher Education. The faculty shall be providing a Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) as from 2016. This brought about an opportunity for the NFCS faculty members to propose a separate undergraduate degree as a feeder of the MTL, with a focus on the different areas of specialisation. The proposal is currently awaiting approval by the University Senate. Presently, students reading for a degree in teaching are required to

take modules from area of specialisation and from educational studies, but the new BA in Health, Family and Consumer Studies is intended to cater for different career paths in sectors other than education. This should be an opportunity that has been felt lacking for a very long time, as not all those interested in the field want to take up a teaching career. Those who wish to specialise in teaching would then proceed to the MTL. This is a milestone for the discipline at tertiary level.

#### **10.10 The way forward – reflections from within**

Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta survived for over 100 years, all the challenges they had to face to gain the status and acquire a legitimate place in the secondary school curriculum. In recent years, there were requests in Britain and the US for the re-introduction of Home Economics education in schools to tackle health, economic and social problems. The Maltese education authorities have not yet fully recognised the impact of this subject on present-day society. The multidisciplinary nature of Home Economics is still a challenge to its status, as outsiders struggle to recognise the subjects' boundaries and the range of expertise of its community members. The relevance of the subject's content and pedagogies to the needs of today's society has been questioned by many, both from inside and outside the discipline. The past still haunts some of its members who take a defensive stance and are not confident in disputing the common perception that their discipline has not moved away from the mere teaching of cooking and sewing.

Professionals in the field must engage in a process of re-thinking to identify the way forward, challenge their status and prove that their field is a relevant area of specialisation. The dissatisfaction experienced by some participants of this study, including myself as a lecturer, relates to familiar themes which were also identified by Pendergast (2001) and Yung Chan (2005), namely the unquestioning dependence on foreign developments, the fragmentation of the discipline, the lack of professionalism and reflexivity among its members, the disrespect by some academics of other disciplines and that of some members of the public, and the constant struggle to prove oneself as a Home Economics and Textiles Studies professional. These themes are a recurring factor in the story of two disciplines that are continuously searching for an identity and legitimation, a situation aptly described by Pendergast and McGregor

(2007): ‘And here home economics sits today, 100 years later, thirsty and desperate for attention’ (p. 9).

This study served as an opportunity for personal reflection on the situation of Home Economics and Textiles Studies education, in Malta and abroad. It slowly transformed my perception of the current condition of the subjects and its causes. As an insider member of the subjects’ community, I understood the urgency of a radical overhaul of our mind-set. Maltese professionals in the field have to be challenged and presented with the immediate reality of the local scene. We cannot ignore reality and assume that the terrain is clear and smooth because it suits our comfort zone. As professionals, we need to challenge the given assumptions about our subjects and re-think their content and pedagogies to meet the needs of our audience in schools and in the community. Society’s needs have evolved at a quicker pace than the subjects’ content.

In order to foster a forward looking approach, some aspects need to be considered if Home Economics is to raise its status as academic discipline. It is necessary to build a local body of knowledge that looks at the wider perspective, beyond what has been done in some countries that have served as models for the local community. Local research has been limited to few publications and almost no ongoing research. An academic research journal ought to be published to serve as a solid platform for a local body of knowledge. The subjects’ association has to conduct an evaluation process and listen to what its members have to say regarding their everyday experience as teachers and look beyond the publication of a quarterly newsletter and the organisation of outings.

In order to set out a medium to long term plan how to meet the challenges set by the IFHE position statement (2008) that is, to future-proof the profession in order to guarantee a sustainable future, Maltese professionals have to learn from the past to understand the present, although, as Vincenti (1997) warned ‘...the past should not be used as a standard by which to measure the future. Depicting home economists as victims can disempower the field...’ (p. 318). She suggested that professionals should possess a ‘...positive vision for the future, based on critical self-reflection, sound reason, ethical principles, commitment, and the ability of the profession to implement its vision is extremely powerful in changing reality’ (p. 318). If these recommendations were to be adopted by the Maltese Home Economics community,

the disciplines could stand a chance of improving their odds for a better future in the years to come.

## CHAPTER 11

### CONCLUSION

#### 11.1 The research question.

The present study set out to answer the following main research question:

*How have Home Economics and Textiles Studies been socially constructed from 1960 to 2010?*

The study also addressed the following secondary questions:

*What are the factors that influenced status and significance – the material interest?  
What are the evolving visions and values of these subjects – the ideal interest? How  
has the balance between material and ideal interests changed over the period under  
study?*

In order to achieve my objectives, I adopted an autoethnographic approach and analysed my data from a social constructionist perspective. In particular, I made reference to a theoretical framework comprising of Goodson's (1983; 1992b; 1994; 1998) theories on social constructions of school subjects, the concept of refraction in education developed by Goodson and Rudd (2012) and Layton's (1972) model on the evolution of schools subjects. This study is not intended to prove the above-mentioned theories, but rather to analyse the data collected from different sources according to the framework provided by the thesis.

#### 11.2 The limitations of the study

The adoption of an autoethnographic approach provided several strengths that enabled me to proceed smoothly throughout the data collection process and analysis. These were mainly related to the ease of access to participants and my familiarity with the area being investigated, as an academic, educator and an examiner in the field of Home Economics and Textiles Studies. However, this proximity also presented challenges, such as my over familiarity with the context and with some of the issues discussed by the participants. As part of a very restricted community, I already knew most of my participants personally before starting the research. I was broadly aware of their views on some of the issues and, as a result, needed to make a conscious effort not to let my

prior knowledge influence the selection of participants, or let any personal or professional relationships affect my decisions on any issues related to the participants. Despite my efforts, I am aware that my high degree of ‘insiderness’ could have limited my efforts at objectivity to some extent. For this reason, I chose to adopt purposive sampling based on the criteria of roles and responsibilities, teaching experience and experience in teacher training related to the subjects. To limit the influence of my proximity to the field and to the members of the community, where possible, I avoided referring to myself and to my experience during the interviews. I also ensured that the knowledge and understandings I brought to the study as an insider and first-hand witness of events, were triangulated with archival documents and data collected from interviews with participants.

A further limitation I acknowledge in my research is that certain information obtained through the interviews had to be withheld because it could have prejudiced the participants’ anonymity. In the Home Economics and Textiles Studies community in Malta, almost everybody knows each other. We know each other’s background, career progress and personality. Consequently, despite the measures I took to guarantee confidentiality, certain views or details could have revealed the identity of a participant to the other members of the community who shall read this study. In order to avoid such an occurrence, in the few occasions where I could not obtain the same information from documentary sources, I opted to leave it out in order not to prejudice my ethical obligations towards my respondents.

### **11.3 Contribution to knowledge**

My research provides a contribution to knowledge in three ways. Firstly, the findings from the research undertaken for this thesis provide a comprehensive picture of the historical development of Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta. An extensive number of studies have been conducted in countries such as Britain, Ireland, America, Hong Kong and Latvia, to examine the historical development of Home Economics, with a focus on the curriculum history in their respective countries (Yoxall, 1965; Sillitoe, 1966; Purvis, 1985; Attar 1990; Stage and Vincenti, 1997; Pendergast, 2001; Apple, 2003; Līce, 2003; Yung Chan, 2005; McSweeney, 2007; Elias, 2008). To date, no previous research has been conducted in Malta on the historical development of the subjects’ curricula and the key players involved in the

process of curriculum change, other than the research I carried out for my Masters' dissertation (Portelli, 1996). This was limited to the archival sources concerning the introduction of domestic subjects in Maltese primary and secondary schools. This thesis, however, adopts a much broader approach in terms of sources and methodologies used, it covers a different chronological period and focuses on all levels of education, including the post-secondary and tertiary levels. Through my background and experience in the fields of Home Economics and Textiles Studies, I felt that there was a need to fill the gap in this largely unexplored area. This study provides invaluable groundwork for local researchers, as it sheds light on why the subjects evolved in Malta the way they did, and on the issues that have conditioned this evolution and could continue to do so in the future. Findings from the thesis will be of relevance to administrators, academics and teachers when planning and implementing changes in the curriculum of the subjects concerned. The in-depth analysis of the development of these subjects will also provide international peers with a study for comparative research about the evolution of school subjects in the curriculum.

The second way my study provides a contribution to knowledge is related to the fact that no other school subject curriculum history has so far been published in Malta. Therefore, my work can serve as a model for other local researchers, historians or otherwise, who wish to study the evolution and development of other school subjects. My findings will also be useful to Maltese practitioners of the subjects and curriculum scholars, by providing insights which help them to better appreciate the strong relationship that links the curriculum to the socio-economic, political and cultural changes experienced by the community. The wider academic audience shall benefit from the application of the theories by Goodson and Layton to the Maltese situation as an example for comparative purposes.

The third way in which my study provides a contribution to knowledge concerns the way the study has been designed and the methodological tools implemented to gather the necessary data. The combination of these tools, especially the life history interviews and the online focus group discussions, together with my status as an insider, is a distinctive characteristic of the study. This methodological approach can provide a model to curriculum history researchers, especially in Malta, for conducting



similar research with respect to other school subjects. This methodology has not yet been used in published research conducted in Malta.

#### **11.4 Final considerations on the findings**

The findings of my study define and describe the issues that determined the evolution of Home Economics and Textiles Studies as school subjects in Malta in the fifty years ranging from the attainment of national independence to the first decade of the twenty-first century. Issues such as status, gender, curriculum and identity were broadly similar to those faced by the subjects' communities in other countries such as the UK and the US. However, they were closely linked to the socio-economic transformations of Malta as a newly-independent island state and eventually as a member of the European Union. This was due to the practical and utilitarian nature of the subjects that had an impact on the country's economic development. This link with the needs of the country's evolving economy brought about fluctuations in the value of the subjects according to the policies and the priorities of the government. The highs and lows within these fluctuations were experienced directly by the participants of this study, whose narratives reflect the efforts made through the decades to retain the subjects within the school curriculum. Being aware of the direct link between the value of the subjects and the evolution of Maltese society is the key to ensure the survival of these disciplines in the Maltese education system, and should constitute the basis on which future strategies for ensuring their continued relevance are devised.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **THE HOTEL STAFF COURSE ORGANISED BY THE HOUSECRAFT SCHOOL IN FLORIANA IN 1970**

The curriculum of the course varied and it included the following topics:

- Cooking\*
- Good grooming\*\*
- Politeness
- Table-manners
- Household accounts
- Planning the housework
- Laundry
- Flower arrangement\*\*\*
- General housework
- Time and motion study

\*Cooking was the main subject and it included –

- The basic method of cooking fish, meat, poultry and vegetables;
- Salads and salad dressings;
- Cheese cookery;
- Different kinds of pastry, including yeast dough;
- Breakfast, lunch, tea-time and supper cookery;
- Planning and catering for a family and a crowd;
- Foods in season;
- Snacks and savouries.

In addition, emphasis was made on the presentation of foods; for the home and also for the restaurant. Maltese national dishes and sweets related to the seasons and festas were given importance.

\*\*A qualified person in the field of beauty care gave lectures on skin care and the use of make-up.

\*\*\*Demonstrations of floral arrangements for the hotel and the home were given by a member of the Malta Floral Club

*Source:* Adapted from RwDE 1970

## APPENDIX 2

### PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE - Life history interviews (LHi)

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>
<i>Jasmine</i>	Teacher, lecturer and administrator	Over 40 years
<i>Camellia</i>	Teacher and lecturer	Over 40 years
<i>Poppy</i>	Teacher	Over 40 years
<i>Clover</i>	Teacher	Over 40 years
<i>Rose</i>	Teacher, lecturer and administrator	Over 40 years
<i>Juniper</i>	Teacher, lecturer and administrator	Over 35 years
<i>Elderflower</i>	Teacher and administrator	Over 35 years
<i>Cyclamen</i>	Teacher, lecturer and administrator	Over 30 years
<i>Myrtle</i>	Teacher, lecturer and administrator	Over 30 years
<i>Marigold</i>	Teacher and administrator	Over 30 years
<i>Lily</i>	Teacher and administrator	Over 30 years
<i>Kennedia</i>	Teacher and administrator	Over 30 years
<i>Daffodil</i>	Teacher and administrator	Over 30 years
<i>Japonica</i>	Teacher and lecturer	Over 30 years

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **UNIVERSITY ETHICAL APPROVAL APPLICATION<sup>1</sup>**

**Title:** Home Economics and Textile Studies in Malta from 1960 till the present day

**Investigators:** Researcher – Lorraine Portelli

Supervisors – Professor Ivor Goodson

Professor Yvonne Hillier

**School:** Education Research Centre, Falmer, University of Brighton

**Level:** Doctor of Philosophy

**Duration of the study:** Starting date – October 2008

Date of completion - June 2014

**Location of research:** Malta

#### **Introduction**

Home Economics evolved as a school subject during the nineteenth century in a number of countries, namely Britain, America and Australia. Originally, what is known today as Home Economics was referred to as home arts, domestic economy, domestic science and housecraft during the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The evolution of domestic subjects (Home Economics) made its definition rather complex since it has been extended over a broad and diverse subject area which is not only multi-disciplinary, but also interdisciplinary in its objectives. Throughout history, the term ‘domestic subjects’ was not used consistently and often acquired a different meaning in various countries. The terminology used in the past varied according to the country concerned and also according to the educational background of the top-level administrators. The latter was especially true in the case of former British colonies like Malta, where prospective educational policy-makers were sent to Britain to further their education and to achieve experience in their area of specialisation.<sup>2</sup>

The evolution of domestic subjects in Malta was generally similar to that of

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<sup>1</sup> This Ethical Approval application was approved at my Thesis Outline meeting, at which my supervisors were present. The meeting took place on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

<sup>2</sup> On the evolution of Home Economics and Textile Studies and how the name changed through time, see Sillitoe (1933), Yoxall (1965), Wynn (1974), Byrd (1990), Stage & Vincenti (1997) and Pendergast (2001).

Britain. This occurred due to the above-mentioned British colonial influence. Most changes and development that occurred in education abroad were experienced after some time on the island. The first type of formal domestic education was needlecraft.<sup>3</sup> Later, cookery, housekeeping and household hygiene were introduced. 'Housecraft' and 'domestic arts' were some of the preferred terms used during the first half of the twentieth century to refer to domestic subjects in general. Decades later, the name 'Home Economics' came to be used, and included areas related to cookery, nutrition, family and home management (Portelli, 1996).

Following Malta's independence in 1964, there has been a gradual increase in attention towards other sources of influence apart from the British model, and much more focus has been given to particular local requirements related to the island's socio-political context. Currently the name which is still used in state secondary schools is 'Home Economics', and it includes two major areas, one related to the family, home and society, and another concerning food, nutrition and health (Home Economics Secondary Education Certificate, 2009). Recently, Home Economics was re-named 'Nutrition, Family and Consumer Studies' at the University of Malta and the Junior College, a post-secondary institution which forms part of the university itself. This umbrella term includes also Textile Studies.

Textile Studies evolved as a branch of domestic subjects, previously known as Needlecraft and Needlework, even earlier than Home Economics and as a separate school subject. It still retains this name and is still being taught as a separate subject in secondary schools. However, both Home Economics and Textile Studies fall under the responsibility of the same education officer.

Up to a few years ago, topics related to the family, health, nutrition and consumer education, food and textiles, fell exclusively under the domain of Home Economics and Textile Studies. Eventually, however, new subjects emerged in the Maltese secondary school curriculum which included topics that are related to the ones taught in Home Economics and Textile Studies. Such subjects are personal and social development (PSD), initially known as personal and social education (PSE), and design and technology (D&T). The latter includes modules related to food and textile technology, which evolved from Home Economics and Textile Studies (D&T Secondary Education Certificate, 2009).

The curricula of Home Economics and Textile Studies have developed and changed according to various socio-political factors, which in turn had a significant influence on status and significance of these subjects, which have traditionally been considered as marginal. On an international level, numerous studies have been conducted in the field of Home Economics, some of which are specifically related to the evolution of the subject in particular countries (Sillitoe, 1933; Yoxall, 1965; Purvis, 1985; Johansson, 1988; Pendergast, 1993; Vincenti, 1997; Līce, 2003; Makino, 2004; Yung Chan, 2005; Mc Sweeny, 2007).

A vast literature has been written on the curriculum, focusing on various themes relevant to a particular historical period, providing an analysis from a specific perspective, and dwelling on the idea of the curriculum in relation to the form of knowledge and its development. There are two kinds of perspectives in studying

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<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth study on Needlecraft, see Portelli (1996).

the curriculum: the rationalist and the empiricist. The rationalist stance maintains that real knowledge is acquired by the mind and is independent of feelings. On the other hand, the empiricists oppose this view completely. They maintain that knowledge is acquired by means of the experience of external influences through the senses (Kelly, 2009). Both theories have been subjected to criticism, yet there are still scholars who continue to adhere to these epistemological convictions.

During the early 1970s, the movement known as 'new directions in the sociology of education' influenced by the work of Michael Young (1971) confronted the dangers of the absolutist theories of knowledge. Young initiated the debate by stating that knowledge is socially constructed and cannot be understood through a philosophical analysis. Social constructionists were concerned with reification of knowledge. This view induced Ivor Goodson to focus his attention on school subjects (1981, 1983, and 1985). He endeavoured to study the curriculum as a social construction by focusing on the relation between the construction of the prescribed curriculum and the policies that lead to negotiation and realisation. Goodson's early work on the curriculum history of school subjects includes a study on Geography, Biology and Rural Studies. Other scholars followed suit and studied the evolution of English, Science, Classics, Domestic Subjects, Religious Education, Social Studies and modern languages (Goodson, 1985), as well as Economics (Jephcote, 2007). Other studies related to the evolution of school subjects have also been conducted in other countries, namely America (Popkewitz, 1987), Canada (Rowell & Gaskell, 1988) and Hong Kong (Yung Chan, 2005).

Historical study of the social construction of school curricula is vital in order to obtain a better insight on the subjects' curricula as from their inception, how they have changed over time and how they survived the challenges posed by other subjects (Goodson, 1988). Such studies are fundamental to create a number of assumptions about the status, significance and resources given to subjects, their structures and the way these subjects organise knowledge. The social constructionist perspective will be the basis on which the research shall be carried out.

### **Purpose of the study**

The study will investigate the curriculum changes that occurred gradually in the field of Home Economics and Textile Studies in Malta.

### **Participants and methods**

#### *The role of the participants in the study*

The criteria for the choice of participants in the study shall be mainly based on their teaching experience in the subjects. A wide range of experience levels is needed for the study, and this will vary from the very highly experienced teachers to those who have graduated from university during these past few years. Other key players included in the research shall be persons who are or were in executive and/or influential positions at the Education Directorate and the University of Malta, and shall be chosen on the basis of their expertise in the field.

Purposive sampling is required for this study, as the participants shall be chosen according to their knowledge, vast experience and social position. As the Home

Economics and Textile Studies community in Malta is relatively small, experts in the field are few in number usually working or have worked at University or/and at the Education Directorate. Currently there are approximately one hundred Home Economics and Textile Studies teachers in Maltese secondary and post-secondary schools. When compared to the number of teachers of other subjects and the size of the country, the Home Economics and Textile Studies community is rather small.

The role of the researcher as an insider is a significant factor within this investigation. The researcher has been involved within the subject community for 25 years. She studied Home Economics and Textile Studies since she was eleven years old and continued to specialise in both subjects at post-secondary school and at university. She was an active member of the subject association for a number of years. The researcher is involved in syllabus panels and examination boards, either as a member or as chairperson of the subjects. She is involved also in paper setting at various levels for the Maltese secondary, intermediate and advanced examinations. Currently, she is employed at the University of Malta and lectures in both subjects, and is involved in the training of Home Economics and Textile Studies teachers. The researcher's background and experience in the field shall contribute to her credibility when conducting this investigation. Insider research involves ethical and sensitive issues. Objectivity is considered as crucial in this investigation as the researcher will employ life history interviews with colleagues and friends, and will be investigating an area already familiar to her. As her personal experience may contaminate the objectivity of the study, the researcher shall try to be as objective as possible during the interviews and avoid influencing the participants by her personal judgment. The researcher shall try to maintain a critical approach in her investigation and shall strive to minimize over-rapport and bias.

Her role and position shall somewhat facilitate the recruitment of participants for this investigation. The participants of the interviews shall be invited to take part in the study, either by phone or face-to-face. One of the main ethical issues of the investigation is informed consent. The researcher should describe the nature and scope of the study, and explain what the interviews will entail, namely a meeting for an hour or so at a place convenient for the participants and that digital recording of the interviewing sessions shall be carried out. If possible, the interview should be held at the participant's own home where the conversation cannot be overheard. However if this is not possible, the researcher will find an appropriate location where the interview session can be carried out successfully. The researcher shall explain to the participants that full confidentiality shall be maintained throughout this investigation and pseudonyms shall be used to protect their anonymity. She will give an information sheet to the prospective participants and they shall be free to contact her when they are ready for the interview session. However, if the prospective participants feel that they should not take part in the project, they will be given the freedom to back out. In this case, the researcher and the prospective participant will not communicate any further regarding the interview sessions. If the participants agree to take part in the research, they shall

be given a consent form for them to read and sign. Both the participant information sheet and consent form will be translated into Maltese for those participants who feel more confident in reading in their native language.

### *The research design – methods of data collection*

A primary method of gathering data for this study consists of semi-structured interviews. Other secondary and more specialised methods, namely focus group discussions and life history interviews, shall be used in order to answer the main research question. Interviews conducted face-to-face enable the researcher to capture a profound understanding of the situations, feelings and values that have been experienced by the participants.

In semi-structured interviews, a good plan and an outline of an interview schedule must be drawn up in order to have an adequate guide for the actual sessions. The characteristics of a good semi-structured interview are that similar questions are asked to all the participants; questions are planned in a sequential order to develop the appropriate themes; supplementary questions are planned to cover the same topics among interviewees. (See the attached draft schedule of the semi-structured interviews) Moreover, the duration of the interviews is approximately the same among all the participants.

A pilot interview shall be conducted with individuals who will not participate in the actual study. Pilot testing may also elicit valid emergent themes and aid in subsequent interviews. The piloting shall be divided into two phases; a pre-pilot stage where the respondent is invited to give critical comments about the interview schedule, and the actual pilot stage which is a trial of the final interview.

The interviews conducted shall be recorded with the participants' consent. If during the interview, the participants feel that they should decline to answer any of the questions, they can do so. Also, if the participants request that the digital recorder be switched off for part or parts of the interview session, as they feel that part/s of the information given should not be included, the researcher shall consent to their wishes. The recorded interviews shall be transcribed and handed to the respondents for them to read. Respondent validation is important in order to obtain valuable feedback regarding the accuracy of the data obtained from the interview. At this stage, the roles of the participants are to confirm that (a) the information given during the interview may be used for the research, and (b) the data they provided shows an accurate account of their beliefs and attitudes (Scott & Morrison, 2006). If the participants feel that some excerpts from the interview should be omitted in order to protect their interests, the researcher has to refrain from using them in the study.

Focus group discussions shall be organised among the participants who are or were involved in the teaching of Home Economics and Textile Studies in Maltese secondary and post-secondary schools. The number of participants depends on their availability and on logistics. At the beginning of each focus group session, the researcher shall make the participants aware of the need to keep information revealed by others confidential, and she will distribute a confidentiality agreement for them to sign. During these focus groups, the researcher will pose questions to initiate discussions related to themes that emerge from the interviews. The researcher shall create a supportive environment that enables the participants to express diverse opinions and views about debatable issues related to the past and



current situation of the subjects, i.e. Home Economics and Textile Studies. A number of focus group discussions are planned for this study; participants will be grouped according to range of teaching experience and teaching level. The use of focus groups as a means of data collection in addition to interviews is important for this research, as the environment can be more informal than a one-to-one interview and the participants may feel more at ease. A supportive environment will assist the participants to think about issues raised and have time to formulate their opinion, especially after listening to the input of other participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Focus groups enable the researcher to discuss themes that emerge as they arise during the discussion. In this way, the focus group can give a more valid contribution to the research. Focus group discussions reduce the issue of hierarchical power dynamics between the researcher and the participants, which is often felt during interviews. However it is acknowledged that when using focus group discussions, the influence of the researcher upon the participants is lessened, but the influence by other members in the group is increased. In order to steer the groups as far away as possible from these situations, the researcher shall resort to her interpersonal skills.

Another method of collecting data for this research is life history. A combined approach of life history with other methods, in this case semi-structured interviews and focus groups, will enhance the study by providing further insights on the experiences of individuals who played a role in the teaching or development of Home Economics and Textile Studies. The life histories of individuals with vast experience in the field of Home Economics and Textile Studies is indispensable as it will provide an account of how the individual has been introduced to the teaching profession and became a part of this community. The life history approach enables the researcher to see how individuals' lives were influenced by a range of experiences that may have had an impact on them.

Bias and validity are two other important issues which the researcher shall encounter when analyzing the data from the life history interviews. It is vital to identify the sources of bias and the techniques to be used to overcome these difficulties. The participant, the researcher and the interview itself are the main sources of bias that are expected to be encountered during the study. The techniques to be used to create validity checks are the analysis of official documents and other interviews, where comparisons can be made in order to verify aspects of the life history interview (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). This type of triangulation promotes the story that is told by the participant into a life history. Through this type of triangulation, the stories told by the participants develop into life histories situated in a historical period and context (Goodson, 2006).

For this study, the data collected during the interviews and focus groups shall be recorded using a digital recorder and note-taking. The researcher shall make use of a digital recorder with the participants' consent and shall be sensitive to situations when this media may be inappropriate from the participant's point of view. The participant shall be asked to choose the preferred language in which the interview is to be conducted. If the participants prefer to conduct the interviews in Maltese, a translation into English will be made to be used in the actual writing of the research. The translation shall be carried out by the researcher herself. The recorded sessions shall be transcribed regularly, in order to identify emerging themes. The gathering of data and its analysis are linked together as this

may influence further interviewing sessions based on the emergence of particular themes. All electronic data will be stored in secure storage systems such as an external hard drive, a USB stick and a CD which shall be password-protected. The USBs and any written data about the participants shall be locked away when not in use.

The participants shall be approached and interviews shall be conducted during the second year of the study (2009-10), in order to collect all the necessary data for this research. During this phase, focus group discussions will also be organised and shall take place at either the Junior College premises, which forms part of the University of Malta, or at the Faculty of Education.

It is envisaged that the research shall have a positive impact upon the participants, as they will have the opportunity to express their feelings, thoughts and beliefs about issues involving Home Economics and Textile Studies. This necessity has been felt by the researcher throughout her career, especially when meeting teachers working in various sectors. Should the participants express this need, the researcher shall discuss specific difficulties endured by the interviewees in carrying out their teaching duties, and try to find the most appropriate way to provide the required assistance.

At the end of the research, it is envisaged that the findings will be published in peer-reviewed journals and presented as papers in conferences both in Malta and abroad. She will present her results of the study during in-service courses organised by the Education Directorate for Home Economics and Textile Studies teachers working in both state and private schools. Consequently, the results and outcomes of this investigation will be provided for the subjects' community.

## **Analysis**

This research is an ethnographic study which will make use of qualitative research methods. Qualitative methodology is the most appropriate for this investigation as this approach will elicit multiple situations which can be studied holistically. It is also particularly suitable for in-depth processes and complex discourse. Qualitative research "... allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables." (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.12). This type of methodology should enable the researcher to focus on the life experiences of individuals and provide a deeper understanding of thoughts, beliefs and values (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This study will focus on the lives of practitioners who were or still make part of the Home Economics and Textiles Studies community.

The study will use aspects of the grounded theory methodology to construct an interpretation of findings from the data collected and its analysis. This method of analysis is valuable for this investigation as "the procedures of grounded theory are designed to develop a well integrated set of concepts that provide a thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 9). Grounded theory will also reveal an interaction between significant conditions related to the research and the reactions of the participants to these conditions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

The analysis of the data will respond to the preliminary research question set at the beginning of the study which was "How have Home Economics and Textile

Studies been socially constructed from 1960 to the present day?” The research will finally delve into the micro-political factors of the status and significance (material interests) and the evolving visions and values (ideal interests) of Home Economics and Textile Studies in Malta; and the relation of these interests in relation to the development of the subjects.

### **Funding**

No other investigators, apart from the researcher, shall be involved in the research. Consequently no additional funding for materials and investigators shall be required.

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## **APPENDIX 4**

### **PILOT INTERVIEW - Interview schedule**

1. When did you start teaching Home Economics (HE)/Textile Studies (TS)?  
How old were you at the time?
2. Who encouraged you to become a HE/TS teacher?
3. What was the reaction of your family members when you told them that you wanted to train as a HE/TS teacher?
4. Where did you train to become a teacher?
5. How many years did you spend at the teacher training college or university?
6. Did you acquire any further degrees or diplomas related to HE/TS?
7. Please explain the type of programme/s you had followed at the teacher training college or university? Did you have any areas of specialisation? If yes, which one/s did you choose?
8. Were you pleased with your choice of career? Would you have wished to do something else?
9. When you graduated from teacher training college or university, did you teach HE/TS?
10. Where did you start your teaching career? How many years did you spend teaching there?
11. Did you teach in other schools? Which were they and how long did you spend teaching there?
12. Were there any specific areas/subjects which you liked teaching more than others? Could you choose what you teach? If not, who was responsible for the subdivision of work?
13. Did the content you taught remain the same over the years? (a) If there were changes, what do you think were the reasons for them, and what changes were they?  
(b) If there were no changes, what do you think were the reasons for this?
14. Did the teaching style change over the years? Who guided or instructed you on the changes? What were the reasons for these new teaching styles?
15. Can you describe any specific event/s that took place during your teaching career which you really believe was very important for the subject's academic position or of particular benefit for the students?
16. What are your views regarding the situation of HE/TS today?
17. Do you think that HE/TS has a future in the Maltese educational system?
18. Would you like to add anything else regarding the teaching of HE/TS?

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE - General Questions**

1. How did you decide to become a teacher?
2. What type of training did you get at the college/university?
3. Can you mention any vivid experience/s that you recall from your teaching career?
4. How did your style of teaching change after the implementation of the NMC?
5. Were there any pedagogical changes since Malta's accession in the European Union? Was there any impact on your subject when Malta became a member of the EU?
6. What are your views regarding the situation of Home Economics/Textiles Studies today, both within and outside your school?
7. What changes do you think will take place with the introduction of colleges in your teaching styles or approach?
8. What future do you expect for the subjects in the Maltese Educational System?

## APPENDIX 6

### INFORMATION SHEET

#### **Home Economics and Textiles Studies in Malta from 1960 to the present day**

I am currently reading for a PhD in Education at the University of Brighton. The research involves an analysis of the experiences of Maltese Home Economics and Textile Studies educators during the past fifty years. This analysis will lead me to identify the main events that have influenced the subjects' status and significance, and the values of those who were involved.

As part of the research, I would like to interview about fifteen current and past teachers of Home Economics and Textile Studies in Malta. The interviews will focus on professional issues and are designed to help me find out more about the visions and values of teachers in relation to curriculum changes that occurred through time. The interview session will be held at a place and time most convenient for you. The interview last about one hour will be audio recorded. If the need arises for an additional interview to clarify some issues, you shall be contacted again to discuss the possibility of holding another session. The interview transcript shall be given to you to review and modify if appropriate. The reviewed version handed back to the researcher shall be considered the final version and the researcher will be free to use any parts of it for publication. .

Your participation in this research is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

The data provided will be used only for research purposes and all the information given will be treated in strict confidence according to the Data Protection Act. Your personal details will be known only to the researcher and pseudonyms shall be used in any written reports about the research to protect your anonymity.

Contact of interviewer: [lorraine.portelli@um.edu.mt](mailto:lorraine.portelli@um.edu.mt)

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss with a Supervisor of the research, please contact either Professor Ivor Goodson: [I.F.Goodson@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:I.F.Goodson@brighton.ac.uk) or Professor Yvonne Hillier: [Y.G.J.Hillier@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:Y.G.J.Hillier@brighton.ac.uk)

Thank you for your support,

---

Lorraine Portelli



## APPENDIX 7

### CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims, purposes and procedures of the project.

I have read the information sheet and understand that:

This project is concerned with finding out more about the experience of Maltese Home Economics and Textiles Studies educators.

There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation at any time without giving a reason. I am aware that I will be audio recorded during the interview(s).

The data shall be stored in a secure and password-protected storage system.

Only the researcher shall have access to the data.

After the completion of the research, the data shall be kept for five years after which it shall be destroyed.

I have the right to read the transcripts of interviews with me and/or recordings.

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me.

Any information which I give will be used solely for the purpose of this research project, which may include publications.

All information I give will be treated as confidential.

The researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

---

**Name of interviewee**

---

**Signature of interviewee**

---

**Date**

**One copy of this form will be kept by interviewee; a second copy will be kept by interviewer**

**Contact phone number and email address of interviewer: 79618628 lorraine.portelli@um.edu.mt**

**If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss with a supervisor of the research, please contact either Professor Ivor Goodson: I.F.Goodson@brighton.ac.uk or Professor Yvonne Hillier: Y.G.J.Hillier@brighton.ac.uk**

## APPENDIX 8

### PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE - Semi-structured interviews

Pseudonym	Position	Subject Specialisation
<i>Sophie</i>	Academic	Home Economics
<i>Chloe</i>	Academic	Home Economics
<i>Dill</i>	Academic	D&T
<i>Phoebe</i>	Retired teacher and administrator	Textiles Studies
<i>Melissa</i>	Retired teacher and administrator	Home Economics
<i>Megan</i>	Retired teacher	Textiles Studies
<i>Holly</i>	Retired teacher	Textiles Studies
<i>Mollie</i>	Retired teacher	Home Economics
<i>Mia</i>	Past pupil	Home Economics
<i>Sarah</i>	Teacher	Home Economics
<i>Madeleine</i>	Past pupil	Primary
<i>Veronica</i>	Retired teacher	Primary
<i>Francesca</i>	Retired teacher	Primary
<i>Pat</i>	Retired teacher trainer	Primary
<i>Noah</i>	Graduate	Home Economics
<i>Adam</i>	Graduate	Home Economics
<i>David</i>	Graduate and teacher	Home Economics
<i>Robert</i>	Undergraduate teacher	NFCS
<i>Kieran</i>	Graduate and teacher	Home Economics

## APPENDIX 9

### HEfocus AND TSfocus GROUPS – THEME 1

**HEfocus GROUP** - Today I shall start with the first theme for discussion. Feel free to write either in Maltese or English and don't bother about spelling. Language structure is of no importance to me. Your ideas and opinions really matter for my research.

#### **Theme 1** – State school Syllabus

I shall divide the discussion onto three subheadings – (a) Theoretical part (b) Practical and (c) coursework component.

In recent years, the state school syllabus has been revamped. Can you identify any reasons for the change and what is your overall opinion about the new version when compared with the old one?

- (1) Can you comment about any shift in the content/topics?
- (2) Can you comment about the new layout of the syllabus?
- (3) Can you comment about the Theory and Practical part of the syllabus? Do you think the practical should be different?
- (4) Can you comment about the coursework component? Do you have any ideas how this could be improved or changed?

Form 1 & 2 syllabus - <http://www.gov.mt/frame.asp?l=1&url=http://www.curriculum.gov.mt>  
(link further to Secondary syllabi and Home Economics Forms 1 & 2)

Form 3, 4 & 5 syllabus - [http://www.curriculum.gov.mt/docs/syllabus\\_home\\_econ\\_07\\_08.pdf](http://www.curriculum.gov.mt/docs/syllabus_home_econ_07_08.pdf)

**TSfocus GROUP** - Over the years, there have been a very small number of candidates sitting for the SEC Textiles & Design. The statistics below shows the number of candidates who applied to sit for the exam from 2005-2010.

Year	Total no. of candidates
2005	33
2006	34
2007	30
2008	25
2009	29
2010	26

As you can notice, the numbers shift from one year to another but remains fairly low.

1. Can you comment about the statistics given in the table above?
2. What do you think is the cause for such a decline? For example in 2005 there were 33 candidates who applied for the subjects and in 2010 there are only 26 candidates.

You can expand further on this issue and may be come up with some ideas how we can improve the situation.

## **APPENDIX 10**

### **A description of a typical day at the Floriana Housecraft School in 1966**

Excerpts of an interview with Mollie, a teacher who was trained at Mater Admirabilis Training College as a primary teacher. After some years teaching Standard VI Practical at a primary school, she was posted to teach Housecraft at the Housecraft School. She was one of the three teachers employed by the Education Department to perform duties at the Housecraft School. She taught at this School for six years until the Housecraft School was closed down due to the introduction of secondary education for all. The administration of the School was under the responsibility of a Headmistress.

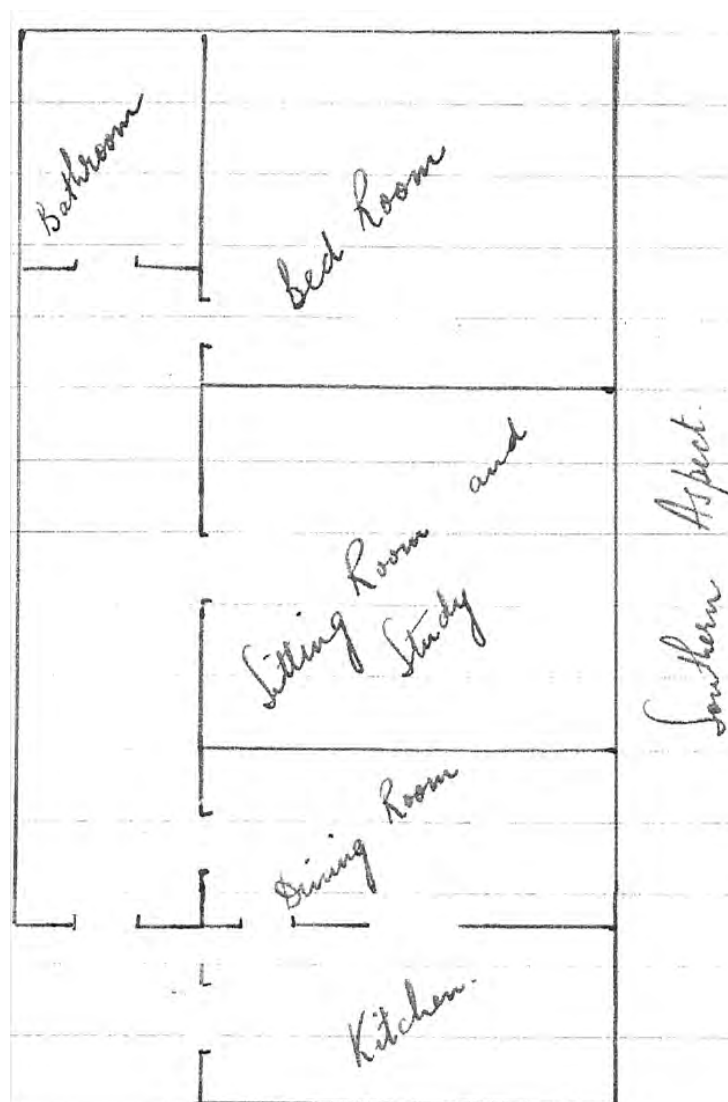
At that time, 15 students used to attend the school daily for a week accompanied by their primary school teacher. There were three teachers responsible for cooking and housekeeping and I was one of them. In the morning, the students used to prepare, cook and serve food. The rest of the day was spent on housekeeping and laundry work. The teachers were responsible for planning the weekly menu, and emphasis was made on providing a balanced and varied menu to the students. Upon their arrival at school, the students used to eat their lunch and the teachers had tea. Then, one of the teachers of the Housecraft School briefed the daily and weekly schedule. After the briefing, the caretaker, together with a teacher from the school and a couple of students, used to go shopping for ingredients required for the dishes planned for that week. The Education Department used to settle the total cost of the bill directly with the shopkeepers. The menu included baked pasta, vegetable soup, baked rice, a meat and a poultry dish accompanied by vegetables, and Swiss roll, Victoria sandwich, milk jelly or fresh fruit, like apples, as desserts. We never had fresh fish but canned tuna was included in the main course on Friday. The menu and recipes were written on the blackboard for the students to copy. The mid-day break was at 12.30pm till 2pm and the teachers took the students to the Mall [a popular garden] or the Argotti Gardens. So as soon as the students were ready from their lunch, we explained to them the layout of the kitchen. There were five kitchens in this large room and each was colour coded. Each kitchen had three tables where the students prepared the dishes, a sink and a cooker. The students were given various tasks; some went shopping, others prepared the vegetables and the main ingredients, some others laid the table and the rest did the cooking. The students used to wear the proper attire, which included a scarf and an apron. Each group of students (three in all) had to prepare a separate dish which eventually they shared and ate. At the back

of the room there used to be a large wooden table where the teacher in-charge demonstrated the dishes that were to be cooked by using the ingredients of one of the groups. There were five dishes that were cooked simultaneously by the different groups. Their school teacher used to be responsible for their behaviour and ensured that every student was doing her task.

After the mid-day break, the students used to lay the tables for the following day. Later they would be divided into two groups, half of them did the laundry work and the rest were assigned to carry out housekeeping tasks. There was a whole floor dedicated to laundry work where students used to be taught how to wash and remove stains from tea towels and table cloths used in the morning. Anything that had to be laundered was taken to the teacher responsible for laundry work. On the other hand, housekeeping involved carrying out some household tasks, such as sweeping the floor, dusting some furniture, making a bed... On the top floor there was a bedroom, a kitchen, a sitting room and the office of the Headmistress. The students used to carry out these tasks on the top floor. Then when it was time to go home, we used to gather the students to say goodbye [Mollie, SSi].

## APPENDIX 11

### A plan of the Housecraft flat at the Girls' Grammar School at Blata l-Bajda



Plan of the Housecraft flat at the Girls' Grammar School at Blata l-Bajda in the 1960

(Source: DEdF, No. 1176/57/7)

## APPENDIX 12

### Number of students' intake opting for Home Economics/NFCS as an area of specialisation in the undergraduate B.Ed. (Hons) programme

Intake (Year)	No. of Home Economics/NFCS students	Total number of Intake in the Bachelor of Education (Hons.)
1984	0	-
1985	2	-
1986	2	-
1987	5	-
1988	2	-
1989	8	-
1990	0	-
1991	3	-
1992	3	-
1993	1	-
1994	4	-
1995	1	-
1996	6	-
1997	11	-
1998	2	-
1999	8	-
2000	15	-
2001	15	-
2002	7	-
2003	7	-
2004	10	127
2005	12	143
2006	12	108
2007	11	157
2008	6	190
2009	11	221
2010	12	205

\* From 1984 – 2003 data for the total number of students' intake in the Bachelor of Education (Hons) was unavailable or unpublished.

## APPENDIX 13

### Programmes organised by the Home Economics Seminar Centre in 2010.

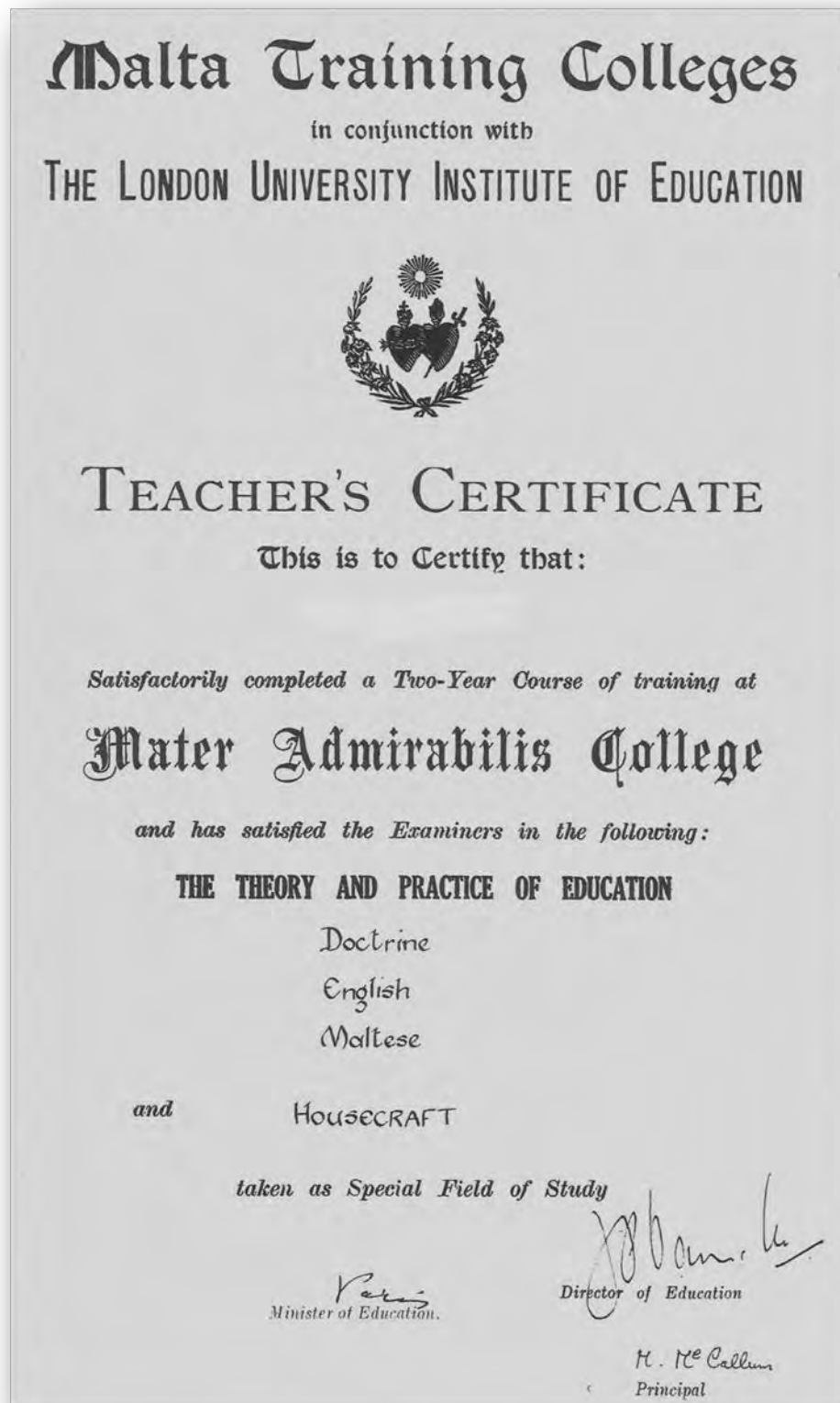
PROGRAMME	SECTOR	TARGET GROUP
A healthy breakfast for a good start	Primary	Year 3
Taste the rainbow	Primary	Year 5
It's all about you	Secondary	Form 1
Nutrition alert	Secondary	Form 1
Aliens in Our Food	Secondary	Form 2
Smart Snacking	Secondary	Form 2
<i>Gawdi saħħtek u saħħet uliedek</i> (Enjoy your health and that of your children)	Community	Parents
Be a Fruit and Veggie Champion	Primary	Kinder 2
The Adventures of Tigger and Friends	Primary	Year 1
Milk Power	Primary	Year 2
Mystery at Hogwarts: Uncovering Packed Lunches	Primary	Year 4
Trendy Choices for Smart Teens	Secondary	Forms 1-3
Leading a Healthy Lifestyle	Secondary	Form 4, 5
Building Healthy Families	Community	Families
<i>Nimmaturaw f'Saħħitna</i> (Keeping healthy in old age)	Community	Senior citizens

**Source:** Adapted from ARGDme 2010, pp. 540-541.



## APPENDIX 14

A teacher's certificate awarded from Mater Admirabilis Training College in 1963



## APPENDIX 15

A sample of a score sheet used for Home Economics during scholastic year 1979/80

HOME ECONOMICS ANNUAL PRACTICAL ASSESSMENT					
Name of Pupil .....					Class .....
1	2	3	4	5	Score
1. Grooming and Poise Untidy hair and in disorder. Dirty hands and nails. Unsuitable apron. Ill at ease through lack of preparation.	Hair reasonably tidy. Objectionable odours. Soiled apron. Upset by unexpected situation.	Suitably dressed, overall/apron, headress. Clean hands and nails. Self confident and capable.			_____
2. Work habits and use of supplies Working surface cluttered with dishes and utensils which are not put to soak or washed. Wastes food. Wastes fuel.	Not very orderly but working space made available, when needed. Spills, burns food. Wastes little fuel.	Works methodically, quickly and correctly. Measures accurately. Economises on use of fuel.			_____
3. Work Habits and use of supplies — Management Does not start by collecting cleansers and equipment. Whilst working, clutters working area with equipment. Uses cleansing agents incorrectly. Wastes cleansers.	Collects most of the cleansers and equipment. Uses some cleansing agents correctly, uses cleansers correctly but wastes detergents.	Starts collecting cleansers, equipment etc. and uses them correctly. Works in an orderly way. Does not waste cleansers.			_____
4. Manipulative skills Has no knowledge of different principles underlying methods of a) cake, pastry making b) vegetable, meat and fish cookery.	Has some knowledge of the different principles underlying methods of cookery but is careless using them when required.	Has full knowledge of the principles underlying methods of cookery and puts them into practice.			_____
5. Sanitary habits Does not wash her hands before starting to cook. Uses soiled spoon to taste food. Dips fingers into food. Uses dirty kitchen linen. Cooker, table and floor area kept dirty. Wears nail polish, jewellery etc.	Washes hands before cooking. Wipes hands in towel. Washes spoon between tasting. Seldom uses tea-towels, oven mittens etc. carelessly. Keeps table clean but not floor area. Doesn't wear nail polish, jewellery, etc.	Washes hands before cooking. Wipes hands in towel. Does not wear nail polish, jewellery etc. Rubbish disposed of correctly. Cooker, table and floor area kept clean.			_____
6. Safety Is not aware of dangerous situations. Clumsy.	Is aware of dangerous situations but is indifferent to alter them.	Prevents and corrects dangerous situations.			_____
7. Ability to follow directions Unable to follow directions through: a) language difficulty b) lack of knowledge. Complete misinterpretation.	Follows directions when explained. Directions partly misinterpreted.	Follows directions carefully without supervision. Good interpretation.			_____
8. Efficiency in use of time and effort Has no working sequence. Doesn't follow time plan at all. Uses too many utensils, works slowly.	Doubtful about precedence. Doesn't follow time plan very well. Uses many utensils. Rushes towards end of assignment.	Wastes no time. Follows plan. Uses efficient methods and suitable utensil.			_____
9. Setting of table Uses wrong serving dishes and cutlery. Doesn't use table linen and table decoration.	Uses only some suitable serving dishes, cutlery. Selects unsuitable table decorations. Uses unsightly table linen.	Selects suitable serving dishes, cutlery and decorations. Sets table correctly and attractively. Uses laundered table linen.			_____
10. Presentation Serves unsuitable quantity of food. Food not well presented. Served at incorrect temperature.	Serves correct quantity of food in some cases. Only some food served at incorrect temperature. Food correctly seasoned and quite well presented.	Serves exact quantity and appropriate accompaniments. Food served at correct temperature. Food very well presented.			_____
11. Meal planning Nutritionally unbalanced, poor combination of colour, flavour, texture. Ignores cost of meal. Unaware of foods in season. Poorly chosen in relation to type and time of meal, occasion and participants.	Balanced meals but little originality. Reasonably good combination of colour, flavour, texture. Aware of seasonal foods but prefers convenience foods for no particular reason. Is partially aware of cost of meal. Reasonably suitable for occasion etc.	Well balanced, palatable, attractive and original in choice. Good use of foods in season and convenience foods. Suitable for the occasion.			_____
12. Table Manners Has objectionable habits. Awkward in handling cutlery. Noisy at table. Makes unpleasant conversation.	Makes errors in handling cutlery. Monopolises conversation.	Has very good table manners. Handles cutlery well. Has ability to make pleasant conversation.			_____
13. Leisure time activities Uninterested in leisure time activities. Uses leisure time idly.	Inconsistent in her interest in leisure time activities.	Is enthusiastic in leisure time activities.			_____
14. Community Service Insensitive to the needs of individuals and unaware of the services provided by the community.	Aware of the needs of some members of the community. Has knowledge of the services provided.	Highly sensitive to the needs of individuals. Regularly takes active part in community service. Encourages others to do so.			_____
TOTAL					_____
MAXIMUM MARKS					50

## APPENDIX 16

Needlework samples worked by a Form III grammar school student during scholastic year 1962/63



Photograph 1



Photograph 2



Photograph 3



Photograph 4



Photograph 5

### A sample of a score sheet used for Textiles Studies

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