



## Challenges Facing Visual Arts Programme of Senior High Schools in Ghana

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**Abstract:** This paper was designed to look at challenges facing visual arts programme of senior high schools in Ghana. Visual arts programme is part of the vocational component of technical and vocational education of the main stream secondary education. This was as a result of the vocationalization policy introduced in 1987 educational reform. The paper treated the topic under the following sub headings: Background of visual art education in Ghana. Status and situation of visual arts education in senior high schools in Ghana and challenges facing visual arts programme in senior high schools in Ghana. The paper was concluded and recommendations were made to improve on visual arts programme of senior high school.

**Keywords:** Visual Artprogramme, Art and Craft, Vocationalization, Senior High School.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Visual Art was first introduced into school curriculum in the Gold Coast, now Ghana in the year 1908 as hand and eye (Foster, 1967). The hand and eye according to Edusei (2004) was an initial drawing exercise which consisted of copying various shapes and lines. The rationale was to develop the co-ordination between the students' hand and eye to accomplish artistic goal. It continued to 1919 when art was introduced into schools in Ghana (Antubam, 1963).The major boost in the development of art in the schools was the establishment of an Art Department at Achimota in 1927.It is significant to note that art was left out in the school curriculum of the first school in the country in the year 1592 at the Elmina castle by the Portuguese. The Danes, Dutch, and the British who later occupied the castles and the forts along Ghana's coast followed the trend.

The Christian missionaries who eventually took over the castle schools from the European merchants will have nothing to do to art. The reason according to Edusei (1991) is that they considered it as a subject that was interwoven inextricably with indigenous culture, which they regarded as primitive' and fetishistic'.

The year 1927 onwards which is noted as the beginning of Ghana's modern development witnessed the contribution of many personalities of both British and Ghanaian citizenry toward the development of art. One outstanding figure is Mr. Herbert Vladimir Meyerowitz an accomplished sculpture and designer who was appointed as Arts and Crafts supervisor in the Achimota College in 1936. He is credited with the transformation of an ordinary teacher training college and secondary art department of Achimota into a School of Art and Craft. This school started offering 3-year Specialist Art and Craft teaching with a bias on Ghanaian African tradition. The scope of this art programme was widened to include subjects like basketry, pottery, wood carving, terra cotta modelling and mural painting. Incidentally these subjects form part of the current visual art programme of senior high school under discussion. The establishment of the School of Art and Craft opened a new phase of the College of Technology, Kumasi now Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. With time the teacher training component of the then College of Technology was transferred to Winneba to be part of the then Specialist Teacher Training College.

It is now the Art Department of the University of Education, Winneba. It has remained the only department in the country training professional art teachers at the first degree level. Its growth and expansion has led to the establishment of two other art departments. They are graphic design and

textiles design and fashion studies. All three departments are turning out hundreds of professional art specialists yearly who are teaching in the senior high schools all over Ghana. In addition the Department of Educational Innovations in Science and Technology of the College of Art and Built Environment of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi has for several years continued to produce professional art teachers at both the masters and doctorates levels. Majority of these graduates are also teaching art at second cycle while the doctorate holders find themselves at the tertiary levels of education.

### 2. VISUAL ART PROGRAMME OF THE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Before the major educational policy and reforms in Ghana in 1987, visual art was perceived as Art and Craft, the two dimensional works being the Art and the three dimensional being the Crafts. Art was compulsory subject for the first three years of secondary education. It was considered as one subject which comprises of seven sections, namely still life drawing, anatomical studies/life drawing, landscape, nature drawing, design and imaginative composition in colour which form the art component. The three dimensional aspect includes basketry, carving, modelling, pottery, batik, weaving and tie and dye which constitute the craft component. Both science and arts students who have interest and flair for creative and artistic expression were at liberty to include art in their course of study for both the General Certificate of Examinations at the Ordinary and Advance levels.

In the 1987 educational reform, visual art was introduced under vocational education programme, and was given some prominence. Coe (2005) noted that the educational reform of 1987 marked the culmination of the separation of Arts and Craft from Ghana's school curriculum. The current visual art programme comprises of nine subjects: general knowledge in art, basketry, ceramics, graphic design, leatherwork, picture making, sculpture, textiles, and jewellery. A school may offer as many of these subject as possible provided teachers and resources are available. The benefit is to provide the student with greater variety of art areas to choose from. Visual Art students are expected to choose three elective subjects: General knowledge in Art which is a composite subject made up of art history, appreciation and general art concepts is compulsory and two other visual art subjects, one from Group A which comprises of graphic design, picture making, and textiles. The other group is made up of basketry, ceramics, jewellery, leatherwork, and sculpture (CRDD, 2010).

The current senior high school visual art education level is built on the visual arts curriculum of early childhood education, the primary school which is labelled Creative Arts and the Basic Design and Technology (BDT) for the junior high school. It is intended to assist students in their acquisition of artistic and aesthetic experiences, knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, all of which contribute to students' whole – personal development. The current visual art programme as compared to the old one covers abroad-based knowledge and skills in the theory and practice of visual art. It emphasizes both art appreciation and art making. It is designed to stretch student's aesthetic and artistic potential and develop their values, and attitudes, thus empowering them to be better prepared for their own future and to contribute to that of Ghana. Akyeampong (2002) lists the general objectives of the visual art programme as follows:

- The primary purpose of visual art programme is to foster and promote creativity by helping students to think, act and feel creatively through a variety of art activities using tools and materials.
- The course demonstrates art activity as an integral part of living.
- The individual is provided with variety of vocational and career opportunities so that he/she can develop intense involvement in, and response to personal visual experiences he/she will develop interest in vocational activities.
- It inculcate in the student the need to appreciate the value of his/her own arts so as to arouse pride, confidence and patriotism in him/her.
- The courses encourage skills in the development of local materials and resources in promoting small-scale and cottage industries.
- The student will acquire knowledge and understanding of the meaning, significance and role of art in socio-economic development.
- The course promotes skills in development of indigenous art technologies, aesthetics, beliefs, values, and attitudes.

- The student will acquire perceptual and analytic skills through art experience as well as self-expression and communication skills through response to art.
- Theoretical knowledge, practical skills and visual thinking in art provide the student with cognitive, psychomotor and affective modes of development.
- The student will acquire competencies in art and apply the acquired skills to national development.
- The student will acquire visual literacy and develop confidence and understanding of visual relationships in the changing environment.
- The course will generate in student a lasting interest in the arts.
- Art activity will develop in the student subjective qualities in harmonizing opposing ideas, contradictions and inconsistencies as to cope with healthy relationships.

He further summarized these objectives into five skills developing areas. These are:

- Skills in the use of local materials and resources
- Developing indigenous art technologies and strengthening aesthetics, beliefs, values and attitudes associated with them.
- Developing perceptual and analytic skills
- Promoting communication skills and
- Developing basic practical skills.

### 3. CHALLENGES FACING VISUAL ART PROGRAMME

These laudable objectives can only be achieved if the government should show genuine commitment, a clear understanding and total support of the vocationalization policy of secondary education. There seems to be a total neglect of visual art programme in senior high schools which is bedeviled with serious challenges. Some of these challenges are:

- Poor implementation of vocationalization policy.
- Infrastructural facilities.
- Availability of instructional materials, tools and equipment.
- Selection of students for visual art programme
- Poor visual art background.
- Large class sizes
- Negative public attitudes and perception towards visual arts

#### 3.1. Introduction and Poor Implementation of Vocationalization Policy

Ghana opted for skill formation system known as the comprehensive high school or diversified secondary school model, simply put the vocationalized secondary system in 1987. The vocationalization policy introduced vocational and technical education into general secondary education, as such visual arts and home economics were labelled vocational in the main stream secondary education. There are a number of rationales for introducing vocationalization into national curriculum. These according to Lauglo (2005) are the personal development goals of educating the whole person, the socio-political goals of providing equality of opportunities and the economic goals of preparing students for the world of work with more economically relevant education. The economic goals stand out as the main justification of vocationalized secondary education under the Education Reform Programme in the late eighties.

As confirmed by Akyeampong (2002) the rationale for the vocationalization of secondary education level is to equip students with skills for paid job and self-employment. The policy appears to have been introduced without serious consideration to funding with respect to equipment supply and maintenance. Since the introduction of this policy, visual art programme have been offered in almost all senior high schools with severe resource constraints, even though vocational subjects are known to be costly and complex. The reality is that the vocational (visual art) subjects in the senior high schools do not enjoy any special financial consideration as in the purely vocational and technical institutions.

Akyeampong(2002)again points out that budgetary allocation to both basic and senior high schools are not determined on the basis of specific requirements for teaching particular subjects. Instead funds are allocated to districts based on a formular which lumps all senior high schools together and basically treats all subject equally.

The vocational (visual arts) education again seems to be denied of assistance from relevant bodies. There is the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET) established by an Act 718 of Parliament in 2006 to formulate national policy on TVET and skills development across pre-tertiary education in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy (GoG,2006). Sadly COTVET which has overall responsibility for skills development training in the country seems not to have anything to do with vocationalized secondary education. With this situation visual art programme in the secondary schools is completely neglected, with the class three schools in the rural communities being the worst affected.

### **3.2. Infrastructural Facilities**

Training in visual arts, like all practice based subjects require specialized facilities for effective teaching and learning. These specialized facilities include studios, laboratories and workshops furnished with the appropriate furniture. They serve as an artistic laboratory which provides platform for the development of collegiate interaction between students and teachers. They also function as learning space for best practice in visual arts. Provide safe and secured storage for equipment supplies, instructional resources and students' project works. The situation on the ground is that majority of the schools do not have facilities that could even pass for a shed. In the absence of such infrastructure, visual art studio practices are ineffectively carried on in the classrooms. It is surprising that supervising authorities of the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service and the examining body, West Africa Examination Council will permit a school to offer any art subject without the basic infrastructure for visual arts. In the case of science programme, these supervising bodies will permit a school to offer science subjects only when they are satisfied a particular school has met the stringent criteria for a standard science laboratory equipped the basic science apparatus.

### **3.3. Availability of Instructional Materials, Tools and Equipment**

A major challenge facing visual art programme in the senior high school is the provision of instructional materials, tools and equipment. Provision of instructional materials is woefully inadequate. The schools find it very difficult to procure simple studio equipment. It is not clear who is to supply the schools with studio equipment, art materials and tools. The reality is that there are so many schools for example offering ceramics without a single manual potter's wheel, so are many others who are offering textiles without a single loom or printing table. These are basic equipment that can be fabricated locally with scrap metal at reasonable cost. There are a small number of schools that possess some useful equipment, but these are simply inadequate to match the large class sizes.

Material for demonstrations are also unavailable or inadequate in most cases. Again most parents of students in the community day schools in the rural areas are not in a position to buy basic art materials like drawing pencils, sketch pads, poster colours and brushes. The result of all these are that effective instructions, demonstrations and studio practices meant to ensure meaningful skill development is seriously undermined. From all indications there seems to be no proper budget for visual art programme in the schools. The schools have no effective plans for consumable supplies, instructional resources, and replacement of equipment, repair and maintenance of equipment. Text books, and other reference materials on visual arts are nonexistent in the school libraries. There is only one recommended text book for general knowledge in art, and none of the other eight visual art elective subjects.

Another issue related to instructional materials, tools and equipment is the use of new technologies in artistic creation. Computer art has now become an acceptable art form, a legitimate form of art production and as a method of teaching arts. There is ample evidence of integration of ICT in the school curriculum, a good number of schools have computer laboratories. Nevertheless computer art is not widely taught, the reality is that there is little integration of ICT into visual arts. Most schools also regard ICT as extension of the science resource centre programme and therefore art teachers have little or no access to the centres for computer art lessons. Besides, most of the art teacher often lack experience, pedagogical training and resource.

### **3.4. Selection of Students for Visual Art Program**

Entry into senior high schools is based on performance of Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). The Computerized School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) that places qualified basic education certificate examination candidates into senior high schools sets low admission criteria for visual art programme. The criteria with respect to the first class schools is BECE aggregate 6-15, whereas aggregates 10 – 25 goes for second class schools and lastly the third class schools is aggregates 10 – 30 (Asihene, 2009 : Siaw, 2009). Currently BECE aggregates close to 40 and above is accepted for visual arts programme. Besides this many other candidates who score excellent BECE grades and desirous of pursuing visual arts are often coerced and lured or diverted into science, regarded as the best programme for brilliant students (Adinyira, 2012; Artwatch Ghana, 2017; Asihene, 2009) Sadly these acts are perpetuated by school heads, teachers and some well- informed parents.

Another unfortunate aspect of selection into visual art programme is that candidates who do not make the grade for science or business will accept placement in visual art for the simple reason of their preferred school, most especially the first class schools. Some schools also go to the extent of recruiting non visual arts students who are sports inclined to beef up their sports teams. These students usually end up in the visual art classes. All these and more go to fuel the perception that visual art is only good for academically weak students. This according to Adinyira (2012), and Asihene (2009) makes some non- visual art teachers hide behind this facade and denigrate visual arts programme and its students to the extent of even refusing to teach in the department.

### **3.5. Poor Visual Art Background of Students**

Selection of students for visual arts by the CSSPS is mainly based on BECE aggregates which are always far behind that of science, business and general arts. The placement system does not consider candidate's interest, aptitude and flair for creative or artistic expression. Apart from the lack of interest on the part of students placed for visual arts, most of them possess poor creative arts background. They may have been taught by generalist teachers who tend to ignore visual art component of the creative arts for the primary school and the basic design and technology of the junior high school.

### **3.6. Large Class Size**

The visual arts programme is mostly characterized by large class size especially in the urban and the peri-urban schools. Some schools have as many as seventy students in a class. This is attributable to the fact that it is regarded as avenue for academically weak students. The large class size couple with lack of essential equipment, tools and materials make teaching and learning of visual arts practical intensive subjects inefficient, even though senior high schools do boast of very qualified art specialists all over country, with a good number of them holding master's degree in art education.

### **3.7. Negative Public Attitudes and Perception towards Vocational (Visual Arts) Education**

Another major challenge facing the development of visual arts in the senior secondary schools is the negative public attitude and perception towards visual arts education. Ghanaians seem to enjoy and appreciate the benefits of art works in all forms but still hold on to the negative attitudes, perceptions and misconceptions of the vocational education particularly visual arts. There is some kind of stigma associated with visual arts wherein it has become associated with lower educational attainment, and lower socio-economic status. It has been a herculean task to address the stigma associated with visual arts, dispel perceptions and misconceptions which work against development of quality visual arts. The popular notion is that visual art is nothing but mere drawing. Since it belongs to creative discipline or practical based discipline it is considered non- academic in nature and therefore is accorded little or no attention in developmental agenda.

Attitudes of many prominent stakeholders in the field of art education programme are manifestations in this down trodden respect. Some parents would not encourage and support their wards to pursue visual art but opt for science and business programmes. The preferred subjects, which they regard with high intellectual values and societal relevance. Headmasters and education policy planners will do all to promote science and others at the expense of visual arts. Even some headmasters are still not convinced that visual arts are as important as literacy and numeracy. Little resources meant for visual arts are always diverted to support other subjects. Evidence of this trend abound in many senior high



schools all over. Budgetary allocations to visual arts are either non-existent or insufficient to cover its routine and development needs.

Interestingly governments since independence have trumpeted the importance of technical vocational education, and this has reflected in all education reforms in Ghana. Yet there is little or no commitment to this end.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Visual arts have been part of Ghana's school curriculum since 1909, and had gone through many changes. Various governments since pre independence era seem to recognize the benefits of vocational educational education and training. Several attempts were initiated to make education less bookish and more practical oriented, thus providing students with skills for paid job and self-employment. This has been the main justification for the many educational reforms initiated in Ghana. Nevertheless visual arts and many vocational subjects in the senior high schools continue to suffer total neglect and support from all stakeholders. Visual arts programme is treated just as liberal arts which requires little resource in terms of equipment, tools and materials. Visual arts programme at the senior high schools is completely denied of resources, recognition and needed attention, making it less attractive. The way out is for the government to exhibit clear understanding of the vocationalized secondary school model and total commitment and support for visual arts programme. Based on the findings of this study, the following actions and recommendations are made to solve the challenges facing visual art education in the senior high schools.

Vocationalized secondary education system where all secondary school in the country are offering vocational programmes (visual arts and home economics) come with a huge cost giving the capital intensive nature of vocational subjects. The most prudent measure is to scale down the number of senior high schools offering visual arts. In this case the burden of financing the many vocationalized schools will be lessened. COTVET should be provided full support and backing to enable it to execute its mandate as stipulated in Act 718 of Parliament of the Republic in Ghana

The government should increase funding of vocational programme in the secondary schools to cater for purpose built art studios, provision of needed equipment, tools and materials. This will contribute to efficient and effective practical skills development. In addition to solving the challenge of equipping all schools, government should establish vocational resource centres in the district and sub district. These centres should be strategically sited to serve cluster of schools in their respective localities. The vocational resource centres will serve as capacity centers to facilitate and make the study of vocational (visual arts) education in SHS meaningful. Local book publishers should be encouraged to publish books for the elective art subjects. These should be made available to all schools and libraries to provide reading material resource necessary for effective delivery of the visual arts.

The ICT and the science resource centres established in the districts should consider incorporating visual arts, in other words computer art into their programme to make resources available for effective integration of ICT in visual arts. ICT should again be encouraged and incorporated in teacher training programmes as means of creation, artistic expression, reflection and critical thinking.

On the selection of students for visual art programme, the CSSPS should set a reasonable admission criteria for visual art. Entry requirement for visual art should not be based solely on performance of BECE. Instead it should be set in a way to attract interested candidates who have the flair, real aptitude and inclination for creative arts.

The government should demonstrate its understanding of the importance of vocational education and make commitment of resources sufficiently to translate principles into action in order to create greater awareness of the benefits of visual arts. This will motivate all stakeholders to shed off or dispel perception of vocational education and training and channel all energies into building a strong and attractive vocationalized secondary education.

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**Citation:** John Benjamin Kofi Aidoo. "Challenges Facing Visual Arts Programme of Senior High Schools in Ghana". *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, vol 5, no. 3, 2018, pp. 136-142 doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.0503014>.

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