



## Visual Arts Education and National Development: An Inquiry into the Popularity of Visual Arts Programme in Senior High Schools in Upper West Region of Ghana

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**Abstract:** The Creative Arts sector has consistently been proclaimed as the bedrock to national development due to its focus on skills training, (self)employment avenues and economic impacts on Gross Domestic Product of economies. Since the introduction of Creative Arts (Visual Arts) in Senior High Schools (SHSs), a plethora of studies have variously been conducted to appraise its successes or otherwise in some regions of Ghana. However, scarcity of such appraisal studies in the Upper West Region (UWR) creates a contextual gap. The study therefore attempts to fill the imminent contextual gap by adopting a qualitative inquiry approach to investigate the popularity of the Visual Arts Programme in SHSs in UWR of Ghana. Census sampling technique enabled all thirty-three (33) public SHSs in the region to be sampled and interviewed. The study reveals that the Visual Arts programme is tenuously unpopular in SHSs in UWR of Ghana as it is offered by only three Schools in the region. Therefore, Heads of SHSs which do not offer Visual Arts Programme in the region should expedite action to have the programme introduced in their respective schools for UWR to fully witness the imbedded massive employment and economic benefits of Art Education. Also, the study established that Visual Arts candidates in the region have variously excelled in their respective Visual Arts elective subjects between 2016 and 2020 West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). The study encourages the schools involved to sustain and achieve more remarkable academic performances in WASSCE while upholding students' skills acquisition.

**Keywords:** Popularity, Senior High Schools, Visual Arts Programme, Upper West Region, National Development.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that Visual Arts education has the potency to engender sustainable national development. According to Kum-Essuon (2015, p. 1) "historical trends and critical observation suggest that nations that formulate their philosophical visions using their arts and culture as a basis are not only better identified globally, but achieve substantial development". Visual Arts education aims at developing the intellectual, moral, social, and physical characteristics of the learners so that they could be able to enjoy a living as a people, support themselves adequately as adults, and contribute sufficiently to nation-building (Swenzy-Dadzie, Nantwi & Issah, 2020). Fleming (2010) notes that Visual Arts education provides for developing a full variety of human intelligence; creativity; education of feeling and sensibility; exploration of values; understanding cultural change and differences; developing physical and perceptual skills. Given these and many other reasons, Visual art has become an important component of the school curricula of nations across the world. In Ghana, Visual Arts constitute one of the programmes studied at the Senior High School (SHS) level. The introduction of the Visual Arts programme in Ghanaian schools was to diversify the then liberal curriculum to include practical or hands-on activities (Akyeampong, 2002; Kemevor & Johnson, 2015; Aidoo, 2018). The scope of the Senior High School Visual Arts programme in Ghana includes subject areas such as; General Knowledge in Art, Graphic Design, Textiles, Painting, Ceramics, Jewellery, Sculpture, Leatherwork, and Basketry (Coe, 2005; Anamuah-Mensah Committee Report, 2007; Aidoo, 2018; Navei, 2020). The aforementioned areas constitute the elective subjects of the

Visual Arts programme that allow second-cycle schools to offer as many of these subjects as possible provided resources permit. With General knowledge in Art as a compulsory subject among them, the Visual Arts programme provides high school learners with a greater variety of art areas to choose from (CRDD, 2010; Aidoo, 2018).

The rationale of the programme is to predispose the Senior High School students to the cultural and aesthetic values of Ghanaian Arts as well as churn out well-rounded graduates with a high sense of patriotism, creativity, aesthetic, cultural, moral, and social values (Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD), 2010). The inculcation of social, cultural, patriotic, aesthetic, and artistic sensibilities would develop positive values such as; tolerance, teamwork, courage, endurance, creativity, and others in learners (Akyeampong, 2002; CRDD, 2010; deGraft-Yankson, 2015; Aidoo, 2018; Navei, 2020) thereby empowering them for their future and to contribute immensely to the development of Ghana. CRDD (2010) further advances that the Visual Arts programme is meant to offer adequate foundation, prerequisite knowledge, and skills to Senior High Schoolers either for further studies or to enable them to take up employment or engage in self-employed vocations after school even when they terminate their education at the Senior High School level. Therefore, the Visual Arts programme in Senior High Schools in Ghana seeks to provide the needed platform to contribute to the nurturing of the manpower needs of Ghana as well as preserving, promoting, and showcasing the unique indigenous Ghanaian Arts for posterity, tourism exploitation, and national development.

Since the introduction of the Visual Arts programme into the Ghanaian second cycle school curriculum, scholars have variously examined the progress or otherwise of the programme from various angles across some regions of Ghana (Antwi-Boadi, 2002; Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare, 2011; Siaw & Nortey, 2011; Brako-Hiapa, 2011; Aidoo, 2018). For instance, Evans-Solomon and Opoku-Asare (2011) examined girls' motivation for and subject preferences on the Senior High School Visual Arts programme in the central region of Ghana. Also, Siaw and Nortey (2011) compared teaching and learning processes to illuminate differences in students' academic performance gap in Visual Arts in urban, peri-urban, and rural Senior High Schools in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Whereas, Antwi-Boadi (2002) evaluated the final Senior Secondary School Visual Arts projects/practical works of students in selected schools in the Ashanti Region. In another breadth, Brako-Hiapa (2011) documented students' Visual artefacts in selected Senior High Schools in the Eastern, Ashanti, and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana which serves as an appraisal and evaluative map for the progress of the Visual Arts programme in Ghana. Quayson (2006) evaluated the Visual Arts programme in selected Senior High Schools in the Western Region of Ghana to reveal the elective subjects taught in those schools, the facilities or human and material resources available for the study of the programme, and how society upholds the programme. With the plethora of appraisal and evaluative studies variously conducted on the Visual Arts programme in Senior High Schools in various regions as herein revealed, little is known about the popularity of the Visual Arts programme in Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The study, therefore, sought to inquire from the various Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana to ascertain the number of high schools offering the Visual Arts programme in the region. This includes investigating the challenges and successes of the Visual Arts programme in Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana while making appropriate recommendations for the promotion of resilient Visual Arts education in Senior High Schools in the region due to its associated employment and development benefits.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

The study was influenced by available conceptual deliberations that uphold Creative Arts as a catalyst for national development. The instrumental role of Creative Arts in progressive national development is well corroborated by many scholars (Myerscough, 1988; Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies, 2010-2016; Reeves, 2002; Essel, 2013; Ukwa & Okolie, 2014; Joshua, 2015; Essel, Navei, Quarshie & Donkoh, 2020; A New Approach, 2020; Liang & Wang, 2020). Although the status quo is not the same across the globe, the Creative Arts sector in developed communities like the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and other Asian nations have made influential contributions to national development way beyond what African nations

have witnessed (Joshua, 2015). Myerscough's (1988) study of the importance of the Arts in Britain is regarded as the first publication which put the issue of the impact of the Arts sector onto the political agenda (Reeves, 2002). In that study, Myerscough reports that Britain has a growing, robust, and value-added arts sector in its own right with a turnover of £10 billion while employing over 500,000 people. Ten years later, Creative Industries Task Force (1998) sought to provide a national overview of the economic contribution of the creative industries to Britain and reports that the "creative industries generate £60 billion in revenues and an estimated £7.5 billion exports per year, account for over 1.4 million jobs, and have a growth rate of 5%, faster than any other sector in the economy" (as cited in Reeves, 2002, p.10). It was further suggested that if the creative industries of Britain such as; advertising, antiques, architecture, crafts, design, fashion, film, performing arts and others "grew by only 4% a year up to 2007, it would generate £81 billion in revenues and account for 1.5 million jobs" (The Creative Industries Task Force, 1998; as cited in Reeves, 2002, p.10). This clearly shows that the Arts sector is contributing significantly to the progressive development of Britain. In the United States of America, it is reported that "Arts and culture-related industries, also known as creative industries, provide direct economic benefits to states and communities: They create jobs, attract investments, generate tax revenues, and stimulate local economies through tourism and consumer purchases" (Hayter & Pierce, 2009, p. 4). The report adds that:

The creative industry in Arkansas, for example, employs nearly 27,000 individuals and generates \$927 million in personal income for Arkansas citizens. Creative enterprises are the state's third-largest employer-after transport and logistics and perishable and processed foods. In North Carolina, the wages and income of workers employed by creative industries infused \$3.9 billion into the state's economy in 2006. And in Massachusetts, the 17.6 percent yearly growth of the cultural sector contributed \$4.23 billion to the state's economy. (Hayter & Pierce, 2009, p. 4)

Also, a report issued by the Committee on Education and Labor of the U.S. House of Representatives (2009) notes that both the National Governors Association and the U.S. Conference of Mayors have agreed that investing in arts and culture-related industries provide important economic benefits to local and regional economies. The committee further points out that it is "no surprise that America's overall nonprofit arts and culture industry generates \$166.2 billion in economic activity every single year. The national impact of this activity is significant. It supports 5.7 million jobs and generates \$29.6 billion in government revenue" (Committee on Education and Labor, 2009, p. 3). In 2021, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) reports that Arts and cultural economic activity which include; performing arts, museums, design services, Fine Arts education, and others accounted for 4.3 percent, or \$919.7 billion, of current-dollar Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with nationwide employment increment of 1.2 percent and a total number of arts and cultural jobs for the nation was 5.2 million for the year 2019 (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2021).

Another developed country experiencing economic growth and national development through a robust Creative Arts industry is the republic of China. According to Liang and Wang (2020), China is only one of many countries worldwide that has used cultural and creative industries (CCIs) as a driver of growth for economic and urban development. A report issued by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2018) reveals that China's trade in creative goods between 2002 and 2015 has increased significantly with an average growth rate of 14 percent. "In 2002 China's trade in creative goods and services was \$32-billion. By 2014, this figure had increased more than fivefold tallying \$191.4 billion" (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2018, p. 11). In 2015 Chinese creative goods exports were four times that of the United States and noted as the country with the world's highest creative trade surplus of \$154 billion due to its high number of exports (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2018). In another breadth, a comprehensive report issued by A New Approach (ANA), an independent think tank championing effective investment and return in Australian arts and culture, established that cultural and creative economy contributed:

\$111.7 billion to the Australian economy (6.4% of GDP) in 2016–17, and employing more than 800,000 people (8.1% of the total workforce), this is an industrial area that is internationally recognised as resistant to automation and as a jobs-rich area of the economy.

The cultural and creative economy has significant growth potential to 2030 and beyond. (A New Approach, 2020, p.8)

Per APA report as espoused, twelve (12) domains constitute the cultural and creative economy of Australia. These include broadcasting, electronic or digital media, and film; design; environmental heritage; fashion; library and archives; literature and print media; museums; music composition and publishing; other cultural goods - manufacturing and sales; performing arts; supporting activities; Visual Arts and crafts (ANA, 2020). And from the report, it is conspicuous that the combined effect of cultural activities and creative Arts on the national development of Australia is impressive.

Although the success stories of Creative Arts in the massive economic transformation of developed nations as espoused exceedingly surpass the case of African nations, the potentials of the Arts sector to transform African economies is uncontested. In Nigeria, it is strongly argued that Visual Arts have the propensity to generate economic activity, and in turn, contribute to the GDP of Nigeria only if a deliberate step is taken to revive the Arts sector (Nworie & Okolie, 2014; Joshua, 2015). Nworie and Okolie (2014) emphasised that the promotion of Visual Arts education in Nigerian institutions would lead to massive youth (graduates) employment/self-employment with some acting as employers of labour thereby contributing to and at the same time benefiting from the economic growth and development of the country.

Although much is still expected of the Arts sector in Ghana, Essel (2013) axioms that Arts could be used as ‘litmus test’ in national economic development to expedite the developmental success stories of Ghana” (Essel, 2013, p. 83). Essel buttresses that apart from the impactful contribution of Arts to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Ghana, many Small and Medium Enterprises (music and film industries, fine arts, crafts industries, art shops; art galleries and Craft Villages) including the creative industry form a major part of all establishments in Ghana, constituting about 90% of all enterprises which generate about 60% of employment. Therefore, the holistic development of all the subsectors of the Creative Arts industry would intensify Ghana’s economic development. Considering the huge economic potentials of the Ghanaian Creative industry as espoused even in its current wobbling state, much more deliberate but proactive steps are urgently desired to aggressively promote the arts sector for it to fully contribute to the socio-economic development of the nation. In this wise, Essel, Navei, Quarshie and Donkoh (2020) call on the law enforcement institutions of Ghana to swiftly and strictly enforce the existing legal and regulatory regimes targeted at dealing with piracy, patenting, or copyright-related issues that have over the years retrogressed the Creative Arts sector. The authors further appealed to the legislative arm of the Ghana government to fast-track the passage of the Creative Arts bill which was then pending in parliament but lately passed into law in 2020. The passage of the Creative Arts bill into a legal regime and its strict enforcement would contribute to transforming the Creative Arts sector for the accelerated development of Ghana's loan/donor-driven economy. In addition, the enactment of a resilient National Creative Arts Policy is sincerely desirous to provide clear directions for the development of the Creative Arts sector in Ghana (Essel, et al., 2020). The combined effect of the enactment of National Creative Arts Policy and the strict enforcement of all the existing Creative Arts-related legal/regulatory regimes would promptly facilitate the establishment of Creative Arts Fund to be selflessly invested in the transformation of all the subsectors of the area, including Art education, for national development. Until Ghana urgently relooks at her Art curriculum and its implementation, Arts-related laws in terms of enforcement, amendment, new legal regimes, and regulations to address the apparent sophisticated legal issues affecting distinct segments of Ghanaian Creative Arts such as; copyright, fine art insurance, regulations governing the marketing of arts, protective import and export tariffs or restrictions without necessarily being protectionist, the development of Ghanaian Creative Arts sector would continue to remain nothing to write home about (Essel, et al., 2020).

The resilience of the Arts sector in contributing to the holistic development of nations across the globe is unquestionable as demonstrated. The study was therefore premised on the conceptual framework that upholds the Arts as a catalyst for national development as herein extensively discussed.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The study was underpinned by the qualitative inquiry design which conveniently allowed direct interpersonal and social encounters with the research participants at their natural settings to elicit their lived experiences (Creswell, 2007; Given, 2008; Yin, 2011; Kusi, 2012) regarding the pertinent issue under investigation. Thus, an inquiry into the popularity of the Visual Arts Programme in Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana, mirrored within the concept of Creative Arts as the bedrock for national development. With qualitative inquiry design as the roadmap, the study through the use of semi-structured personal interviews and unstructured field observations, gathered data from a total of thirty-three (33) censused research participants which consisted of heads of all public Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The use of Census sampling technique to obtain heads of all public Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region became imperative as the study sought to reveal the popularity of the Visual Arts programme in terms of the number of schools offering it as well as examine the associated successes and challenges of the programme in Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana.

With data collection processes, comprehensive field observations were personally conducted by the researchers with emphasis placed on schools offering the Visual Arts programme to ascertain a holistic view of the status of the programme at the senior high school level in the Upper West Region of Ghana. Also, all interview sessions were tape-recorded and involved asking open-ended questions from a prepared guide and mostly followed-up with relevant probes to elicit detailed data for the study. All interview-related data were transcribed and reconciled with the field notes with key findings coherently analysed under emerging themes. The analysis and discussion of the findings of the study consisted of detailed textual description and interpretation, and in some instances, incorporated basic descriptive statistics such as numbers and percentages. The inclusion of numeric data, termed by Becker as quasi statistics, in qualitative research is allowable as consistently argued by scholars (Becker, 1970; Hammersley, 1992; Maxwell, 2010). One other key methodological consideration of the study during data analysis was the handling of ethical issues. Ethical issues herein referred to as deliberate measures adopted by the study not only to safeguard the confidentiality of the data gathered but to ensure the anonymity of the research participants. By doing so, pseudonyms were used to designate the actual names of the study participants and the schools involved.

### **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents an analytical discussion of the major findings of the study borne out of the data gathered from heads of all public Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana regarding the popularity of the Visual Arts programme in their respective schools. Also, the successes and challenges inherent with the Visual Arts programme are examined to gain a holistic view of its status in the region. The discussion and analysis of the results of the study are herein coherently presented under major themes and sub-themes.

#### **4.1. Popularity of Visual Arts Programme in Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana**

The term popularity operationally relates to the level of acceptance or status, in this case, of the Visual Arts programme at the Senior High School level in the Upper West Region of Ghana. As of the time the study was conducted, thirty-three public Senior High Schools were identified in the Upper West Region of Ghana. Out of the thirty-three schools, only three (3) schools (labeled as *SHS-VAP1*; *SHS-VAP 2* & *SHS-VAP 3*) representing nine percent (9%) had mounted the Visual Arts programme with thirty (30) schools (91%) not offering the programme as indicated in table 1. It is also noteworthy to point out that two out of the thirty (30) schools which did not run Visual Arts as a full-time programme, had only introduced General Knowledge in Art (a compulsory subject of the Visual Arts programme) as an optional subject for Home Economics students. Although it is laudable that two other schools (herein referred to as *SHTS-GKA1* & *SHTS-GKA 2*) have introduced General Knowledge in Art as an optional subject for Home Economics students as aforementioned, they could not be considered as schools offering full-time Visual Arts programme in those respective schools.

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**Table1.** *The popularity of the Visual Arts Programme in Senior High Schools (SHSs) in the Upper West Region of Ghana*

Schools	Number of SHS	Percentage (%)
SHSs offering Visual Arts Programme	3	9%
SHSs which do not offer Visual Arts Programme	30	91%
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100%</b>

(Source:Fieldwork, 2021).

Considering the total number of public Senior High Schools (33) in the Upper West Region and the number of schools (3) offering Visual Arts as a full-time programme as observed in Table 1, it means that the popularity of the programme in the Upper West Region is tenuous and highly insignificant. This implies that the massive socioeconomic development associated with the promotion of Creatives Arts sector reiterated by studies (Myerscough, 1988; Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies, 2010 – 2016; Reeves, 2002; Essel, 2013; Ukwa & Okolie, 2014; Joshua, 2015; Essel, Navei, Quarshie & Donkoh, 2020; A New Approach, 2020; Liang & Wang, 2020) particularly borne out of adequate financial investment or effective promotion of Art education, is hugely compromised in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The numerous advantages embedded in the rationale of the Visual Arts programme also elude the educatees of Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The Curriculum Research and Development Division-CRDD (2010), renamed as National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) outlines that the Visual Arts programme is meant to provide the adequate foundation, prerequisite knowledge, and skills to students in Senior High either for further studies or to take up (self) employable creative skills' job opportunities after school even when they terminate their education at the Senior High School level. This is incontestably the case as the job prospects of Visual Arts are numerous some of which include but not limited to: commercial Graphic design (printmaking, stamp designing; bookbinding; designing of posters, invitation cards, billboards, signpost and others); Ceramics/Pottery vocations (production of flower vases, pots, earthen bowls, cups and others); Carving and modelling of sculptural works for sale; Commercial production of Jewelry articles (ear-rings, necklaces, bags, footwear, bangles, anklets waist beads/chains and others), commercial painting (wall-interior & exterior painting, portraiture, decorative wall paintings and others); Textiles/fashion design job (establishing sewing and designing centres to render textiles and fashion design related services), and Leatherwork vocations (production of footwear, belts, bags, purse, furniture, clothing, upholstery and others) (Amenuke, Dogbe, Asare, Ayiku & Baffoe, 1999; Curriculum Research and Development Division - CRDD, 2010; deGraft-Yankson, 2015; Navei, 2020). It is based on these aforementioned and many other concrete job prospects of the Visual Arts programme that deGraft-Yankson (2015) insists that:

The most abiding of all the reasons for studying Visual Arts and considering it as a subject of choice is that no student, after any level (whether the certificate, diploma, first degree, second degree, or Ph.D.) has a place in the Unemployed Graduates Association of Ghana (UGAG) unless such graduates opt to join for personal reasons (p.3).

Given the numerous benefits of studying the Visual Arts programme as espoused, the study made attempts to ascertain the plans of the remaining 30 Senior High Schools which do not currently offer the Visual Arts programme in the Upper West Region of Ghana (Table 1). It was found that only four (4) of the 30 schools expressed interest in mounting the programme soon with the remaining schools being silent on the matter. The four schools which had plans to mount the Visual Arts programme attributed their delay in the introduction of the programme in their schools to constraints of resources (human & material). The respondents of the four schools mentioned the absence of Art studios, equipment, and consumables as well as the difficulty in getting Art teachers posted to their respective schools. Studies by Quarshie and Kpogo (2020) and Aidoo (2018) confirm that lack of rooms for studio sessions, insufficient Visual Arts teachers, tools, materials, and equipment have prevented most Senior High Schools in Ghana from mounting the Visual Arts course. The study however established that steps were far advanced in getting the Visual Arts programme mounted in the four schools as they argued that focus on practical programmes such as Visual Arts would necessarily contribute in

addressing Ghana's long pursued of ailing liberal education whose yearly graduates continue to escalate the country's unemployment situation thereby creating a high dependency ratio on the few family members who are employed as well as increasing media reportage of social vices such as burglaries, and others in the country. One of the heads of the four schools ready to mount the Visual Arts programme stated that:

...I am a trained artist from the Department of Art Education, University of Education, Winneba. So, I am very conversant with the economic and job prospects of TVET [Technical Vocational Education and Training] programmes. Having taken over as the Headmaster of this school one year running, I have initiated due processes to get one of the TVET programmes mounted in the school. I have already secured some Visual Arts textbooks as the school prepares to mount the Visual Arts programme. As soon as I am successful with the acquisition of the basic facilities, materials, and a considerable number of teachers and with the approval of the necessary authorities, I will mount the Visual Arts programme without further hesitation. (SHS-Headmaster Participant 4, personal communication, September 15, 2021)

It is important to state that until the majority if not all of the Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana see the urgent need to mount the Visual Arts programme, the numerous concrete job opportunities, and the accrued socio-economic and development prospects of the programme (Myerscough, 1988; Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies, 2010-2016; Reeves, 2002; Essel, 2013; Ukwu & Okolie, 2014; Joshua, 2015; Essel, Navei, Quarshie & Donkoh, 2020; A New Approach, 2020; Liang & Wang, 2020) would continue to elude many more senior high schoolers and the local economy of the Upper West Region of Ghana. This means that the accrued socioeconomic and development prospects of the Visual Arts subsector of Creative Arts would continue to evade the good people of Upper West Region of Ghana.

#### **4.2. Academic Performance of Senior High Schools Offering Visual Arts Programme in the Upper West Region of Ghana**

The various elective subjects and their correlating academic performance of each of the three Senior High Schools (*SHS-VAP1*; *SHS-VAP 2* & *SHS-VAP 3*) offering Visual Arts as a programme in the Upper West Region of Ghana were of great interest to the study. As represented in Table 2, the various Visual Arts elective subjects taught in the schools included: General Knowledge in Art, Graphic Design (2-Dimensional Art) and Ceramics (3-Dimensional Art) in the case of *SHS - VAP1*; General Knowledge in Art, Graphic Design (2-Dimensional Art), Picture Making (2-Dimensional Art), Leatherwork (3-Dimensional Art) and Jewellery (3-Dimensional Art) in *SHS-VAP 2*, and General Knowledge in Art, Graphic Design (2-Dimensional Art), and Leatherwork (3-Dimensional Art) for *SHS-VAP 3*. A cursory view of the combination of the Visual Arts elective subjects in the case of the three schools reveals that they have all met the threshold of exposing their respective students to, at least, one each of 2-Dimensional and 3-Dimensional subject areas of the Visual Arts programme (CRDD, 2010).

**Table2.** *Elective subjects of the three Senior High Schools offering Visual Arts Programme in the Upper West Region of Ghana*

<b>Schools</b>	<b>Visual Arts Elective Subjects</b>
<i>SHS-VAP1</i>	General Knowledge in Art (GKA) Graphic Design Ceramics
<i>SHS-VAP2</i>	General Knowledge in Art (GKA) Picture Making Graphic Design Leatherwork Jewellery (lately introduced)
<i>SHS-VAP3</i>	General Knowledge in Art Graphic Design Leatherwork

(Source:(Fieldwork, 2021).

It was also revealed that the Art educators in all the three schools (*SHS-VAPI*; *SHS-VAP 2* & *SHS-VAP 3*) have the expertise to handle the elective subjects mounted in their respective schools as their major and minor areas of specialisation during university education attest to that effect. One other key finding common to all the three schools (*SHS-VAPI*; *SHS-VAP 2* & *SHS-VAP 3*) pertained to the lack of state-of-the-art studios equipped with 21st-century equipment, tools, and other logistical necessities. The existing old-fashioned art studios observed in the three schools are further faced with the inadequate supply of Art consumables and other logistics for more effective teaching and learning of the various elective subjects (Table 2) mounted in the schools. Non-existence and/or inadequate state-of- the art laboratories, equipment, tools, logistics, and consumables are specifically common to schools offering Visual Arts programmes in Senior High Schools in Ghana (Aidoo, 2018; Quarshie & Kpogo, 2020).

Despite the facility and logistical challenges confronting the three Senior High Schools *SHS-VAPI*; *SHS-VAP 2* & *SHS-VAP 3*) in the Upper West Region of Ghana, the study establishes that the academic performance of the schools in the Visual Arts elective subjects in West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) is highly commendable as indicated in Table 3, 4 and 5. For the past consecutive five years (2016-2020), none of the three schools scored a cumulative average below 70% in any of the Visual Arts elective subjects in their respective schools.

**Table3.** Analysis of WASSCE Results (between grade A1-D7) of *SHS-VAPI* from 2016-2020.

Year	Total Number of Registered Candidates	Subjects and Percentage (%) pass		
		General Knowledge in Art	Graphic Design	Ceramics
2016	70	(57) 81%	(60) 86%	(70) 100%
2017	64	(62) 97%	(47) 74%	(56) 87%
2018	58	(52)90%	(57) 98%	(58) 100%
2019	60	(53) 89%	(60) 100%	(59) 98%
2020	45	(45) 100%	(36)79%	(43) 96%
Total	297	(269)100%	(260)100%	(286)100%

(Source: Fieldwork, 2021).

Table 3 comprehensively presents the Visual Arts elective subjects offered by one of the Senior High Schools (anonymously labeled as *SHS-VAPI*) and the average academic performance of its candidates in West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) for the past five (5) consecutive years. It is observed that 70 Visual Arts candidates sat for General Knowledge in Art (GKA), Graphic Design, and Ceramics in the 2016 WASSCE out of which 57, 60, and 70 of the candidates representing 81%, 86%, and 100% respectively scored grades from A1 to D7 in *SHS-VAPI* as observed in Table 3. Also, 62, 47, and 56 out of a total of 64 Visual Arts candidates respectively scored grades between A1 to D7 representing an average percentage pass of 97%, 74%, and 87% in General Knowledge in Art (GKA), Graphic design and Ceramics in the 2017 WASSCE. Comparatively, the average performance of 2016 WASSCE candidates in the Visual Arts elective subjects (Table 3) in terms of average percentage pass, outweighs that of 2017 except the case of General Knowledge in Art which witnessed an improved average percentage pass of 97% in 2017 and 81% in 2016. For 2018 WASSCE, *SHS-VAPI* presented a total of 58 Visual Arts candidates where 52 of them representing 90% passed General Knowledge in Art (GKA); 57 (98%) of the candidates passed Graphic design with all the 58 candidates passing Ceramics. Although 2018 WASSCE witnessed a further drop in the total number of Visual Arts candidates (58) as compared to that of 2017 (64) and 2016 (70), the average percentage pass of the candidates in 2018 WASSCE in General Knowledge in Art, Graphic design and Ceramics (Table 3) shows remarkable improvement with a least average percentage score of 90% as compared with that of 2016 and 2017. Additionally, the number of candidates and their respective average percentage pass scores in General Knowledge in Art, Graphic design and Ceramics in 2019 WASSCE in *SHS-VAPI* include;53 candidates (89%), 60 candidates (100%), and 59 candidates (98%) out of a total number of 60 candidates as observed in Table 3. Whereas the school (*SHS-VAPI*) had maintained its remarkable performance with 89% as the least average percentage grade score between A1 and D7, the total number of the candidates increased by 2 as compared to 2018. Lastly, 45, 36, and 43 out of a total of 45 Visual Arts candidates,



respectively, obtained; 100%, 79%, and 96% in General Knowledge in Art, Graphic design, and Ceramics in the 2020 WASSCE. A comparative analysis of the total number of candidates presented for WASSCE from 2016 to 2020 shows that 2020 WASSCE recorded the least declined total number of candidates (45) as compared with 2019 (60), 2018 (58), 2017 (64), and 2016 (70).

A holistic view of Table 3 reveals that all the average percentage scores of the candidates in *SHS-VAP1* for the five years (2016-2020) under analysis are impressive with 74% as the least average percentage score and 100% pass, in at least, one of the Visual Arts elective subjects in all the years except 2017 which recorded 97% as its highest average score. The research participant of the school attributes the performance of the WASSCE candidates in the Visual Arts elective subjects to effective teaching and learning overridden by students' enthusiastic interest in acquiring creative skills for income generation while in and out of school. It is also noteworthy to state that the school (*SHS-VAP1*) churned out a total number of 297 graduates from 2016 to 2020 out of which 269, 260, and 286 of the graduates, respectively passed General Knowledge in Art, Graphic design and Ceramics for the five years. Although the school witnessed a high pass rate for the period as afore-analysed, the total number of graduates (269) produced within the five years is highly insignificant. The head of the Visual Arts department who provided the available data on behalf of the school head attributed the low five years (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 & 2020) cumulative number of 297 graduates for the Visual Arts' elective subjects to misinformation and the general misconception that parents and basic school students have about the prospects of the Visual Arts programme in the Senior High School. It was further pointed out that:

The Visual Arts programme is generally seen as a path meant for low thinkers and academic dwarfs. The associated stigma borne out of this misinformation and/or misperception about the programme has over the years created general apathy in the minds of parents and Junior High School students when it comes to programmes selection by candidates of Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). So, after such students are enrolled in General Arts, General Science, and other programmes, they later express interest in switching to study Visual Arts programme after observing their Visual Arts school mates produce functional and decorative artefacts. But such students, in most cases if not all, are denied the opportunity by the school authorities. Even though the department of Visual Arts of our school could comfortably admit not less than 150 students per academic year, if students are not placed to pursue the programme, we have no power to force students to study the programme. This amongst other factors continue to cause low enrolment for the Visual Arts programme in our school. (*SHS-VAP1* Participant 1, personal communication, July 25, 2021)

Issues relating to misinformation and/or misconceptions labeled against the study of the Visual Arts programme at the Senior High School level in Ghana have similarly been reported by previous studies (Aidoo, 2018; Quarshie & Kpogo, 2020).

**Table 4.** Analysis of WASSCE Results (between grade A1-D7) of *SHS-VAP2* from 2016-2020.

Year	Total Number of Registered Candidates	Subjects and Percentage (%) pass			
		GKA	Graphic Design	Picture Making	Leatherwork
2016	50	(43) 86%	(50) 100%	(49) 98%	(45) 90%
2017	65	(58) 89%	(60) 92%	(53) 82%	(60) 92%
2018	53	(48)91%	(53) 100%	(51) 96%	(44) 83%
2019	53	(53) 100%	(49) 92%	(52) 98%	(52) 98%
2020	37	(35) 94%	(37)100%	(36) 98%	(34) 93%
Total	258	(237)100%	(249)100%	(241)100%	(235)100%

(Source: Fieldwork, 2021).

Table 4 presents the WASSCE results and the number of candidates presented from 2016 to 2020 academic years of the second school (named as *SHS-VAP2*) offering Visual Arts programme in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The results indicated that *SHS-VAP2* pursued General Knowledge in Art, Graphic Design, Picture Making, and Leather Work as indicated in table 4. The study showed that in 2016, 50 candidates sat for General Knowledge in Art (GKA) with 43 of the candidates scoring

grades between A1 to D7 which represents 86% average pass. Also, 58 out of 65 candidates presented in 2017 passed GKA representing 89%. In 2018, 48 of 53 candidates passed in GKA representing 91% average pass, whereas, all 53 candidates presented in 2019 scored between A1 to D7 in GKA which represents 100% average pass. And, 94% average pass was secured by 35 out of 37 candidates in GKA as far as 2020 WASSCE is concerned (Table 4). The results added that all 50 Graphic Design candidates presented for WASSCE 2016 scored 100% pass with 60 out of 65 candidates scoring 92% average pass in 2017. In 2018, all 53 candidates scored 100%; 49 out of 53 Graphic Design candidates scored 92% in 2019. It was also revealed that all 37 Graphic Design candidates scored 100% pass in 2020 (Table 4). The study further revealed that in Picture Making, 50 and 65 candidates presented in the 2016 and 2017 academic years, 49 and 53 of them passed, respectively, representing 98% and 82% average pass. In addition, in 2018 the school presented 53 Picture Making candidates out of which 51 of them scored A1-D7 representing 96% average pass whereas, 98% average pass was obtained by 52 out of 53 Picture Making candidates in 2019. And in 2020, 36 out of 37 candidates scored 98% average pass. In Leatherwork, 50 candidates were presented whereby 45 of them obtained a 90% average pass in 2016 WASSCE. In 2017, 60 out of 65 Leatherwork candidates scored 92% average pass. Also, 44 out of 53 Leatherwork candidates scored 83% average pass in 2018 whereas 52 out of 53 candidates scored 98% average pass in 2019. With 2020 WASSCE results, 34 out of 37 Leatherwork candidates scored grades ranging from A1-D7 representing 93% average pass as observed in Table 4. It is evident from table 4 that the average scores of the elective Visual Arts subjects (GKA, Graphic Design, Picture Making & Leatherwork) are quite encouraging and appreciative. It is also clear from the analysis that the academic performance of the Visual Arts students is outstanding as a greater percentage of the candidates passed their WASSCE in *SHS-VAP2* from 2016 to 2020. The study found that the outstanding performances of the various WASSCE candidates in the Visual Arts elective subjects were as a result of effective tuition and the direct benefits students derived from practical sessions such as production and sale of creative products to their schoolmates and others. With the direct benefits, students devoted more time to learning and practicing what was taught thereby leading to their outstanding performances within the five years as established by the study.

It is also evident from table 4 that from 2016 to 2020, General Knowledge in Art and Graphic Design subjects scored at most 100% in a year except Picture Making and Leatherwork that scored 98% each in 2020 and 2019 respectively as their highest score. The percentage number of candidates who passed the Visual Arts Elective Subjects in WASSCE from 2016-2020 is quite appreciating notwithstanding the dwindling decrease in candidates presented year by year by the school. It was also ascertained that a total number of 258 candidates wrote WASSCE from 2016 to 2020 with 237, 249, 241, and 235 students obtaining grades A1- D7 in General Knowledge in Art, Graphic Design, Picture Making, and Leatherwork respectively. This figure is far less than that of *SHS-VAP2* which churned out 297 Visual Arts graduates within the same period as observed in Table 3. The continuous decline in the total number of candidates presented from 65 to 53 and further to 37 as observed in Table 4 was attributed to the operations of the computerised school selection and placement system (CSSPS) policy. It was argued by *SHS-VAP2* Participant 2 (personal communication, September 1, 2021) that:

These days we do not get more students from the computerised school selection and placement system (CSSPS) secretariat since the introduction of the Free Senior High School policy in 2017 by the government of Ghana. I thought the introduction of the Free Senior High School Policy would have led to a general increase in our intake across all programmes offered in the school, but, the case of the Visual Arts programme is the reverse. We rely solely on the CSSPS to admit students into our programmes in the school. It is either the case that the programme is not selected by BECE candidates due to ignorance or misperception, or it is that the government, through CSSPS, is deliberately placing few students for the Visual Arts programme to significantly decrease the subventions it would pay for Visual Arts students' practical activities.

The reasons espoused by *SHS-VAP2* Participant 2 about the low enrolment figures of the Visual Arts programme for the period are similarly posited by *SHS-VAP1* Participant 1 except that *SHS-VAP2* Participant 2 further attributes the low and/or dwindling enrolment figures for the Visual Arts

programme to the government’s deliberate use of the CSSPS policy to place few students of the Visual Arts programme to decrease the subventions it pays for Visual Arts practical activities.

**Table5.** Analysis of WASSCE Results (between grade A1-D7) of SHS-VAP3 from 2016-2020.

Year	Total Number of Registered Candidates	Subjects and Percentage (%) pass		
		General Knowledge in Art	Graphic Design	Leatherwork
2016	65	(59) 91%	(54) 84%	(62) 95%
2017	61	(43) 71%	(46) 75%	(56) 87%
2018	37	(37) 100%	(37) 100%	(37) 100%
2019	30	(30) 100%	(24) 81%	(30) 100%
2020	45	(45) 100%	(45) 100%	(41) 91%
Total	238	(214) 100%	(206)100%	(226)100%

(Source: Fieldwork, 2021).

Table 5 reveals the Visual Arts elective subjects (General Knowledge in Art, Graphic Design & Leatherwork) offered in the third Senior High School (labeled as SHS-VAP3) and their corresponding average percentage pass in WASSCE from 2016 to 2020. It is evident that in 2016, 65 candidates sat for General Knowledge in Art (GKA) paper whereby 59 candidates obtained grades between A1-D7 representing 91% average pass. The average percentage performance in GKA declined to 71% in 2017 WASSCE when 43 out of 61 candidates were presented. However, in 2018, 2019, and 2020, candidates’ performances in GKA excellently improved to 100% when all 37, 30, and 45 candidates presented, respectively, scored pass grades between A1 To D7. The study also showed that 54 out of 65 candidates who sat for Graphic design scored 81% in 2016 WASSCE, declined to 75% in 2017 when 46 out of 61 candidates passed, and increased to 100% in 2018 with all 37 candidates passing Graphic design (Table 5). In 2019, 24 out of 30 Graphic design candidates scored grades from A1 to D7 representing 81% average pass witnessing a decline from the previous year (2018) but, improved to 100% when all 45 Graphic Design candidates presented for 2020 WASSCE passed. Again, table 5 reveals that the candidates’ academic performance in Leatherwork in 2016 WASSCE was 95% when 62 out of 65 candidates presented passed. The performance however declined in 2017 to 91% when 56 out of 61 candidates passed Leatherwork. Candidates’ performance in Leatherwork improved to 100% in 2018 and 2019 WASSCE when all 37 and 30 candidates who sat for Leatherwork passed respectively. Finally, candidates’ performance declined to 91% when 41 out of 45 of the candidates passed Leatherwork in 2020 WASSCE. A cursory view of the WASSCE candidates’ performances in all the Visual Arts elective subjects from 2016 to 2020 in SHS-VAP3 reveals a highly remarkable performance. The study, through the research participant of the school, revealed that the remarkable performance of the WASSCE candidates in the Visual Arts elective subjects was a result of hard work on the part of both teachers and students. As established in the case of the other schools (SHS-VAP1 & SHS-VAP2), it was also ascertained that the economic benefits students derive from the programme through production and sale of artefacts to their colleagues and others account for their enthusiastic interest in the Visual Arts elective subjects leading to their impressive academic performance. However, there had been a dire decrease in the number of candidates presented within the period (2016-2020) as observed in Table 5. Also, the total number of Visual Arts graduates churned out within the five years equals 238 with 214; 206 and 226 respectively passing General Knowledge in Art, Graphic Design and Leatherwork.

A comparative analysis of the academic performance of the three schools offering the Visual Arts programme in the Upper West Region as shown in Tables 3, 4, and 5 reveals that Visual Arts candidates excelled in WASSCE from 2016-2020 with each school severally securing 100% in the Visual Arts’ elective subjects. The remarkable WASSCE performances of the schools (Tables 3, 4 & 5) within the five years (2016-2020) as far as the three schools are concerned were inspired by teachers hard work and students' enthusiastic interest in the subjects borne out of the income students make while in school through the sale of self-produced artefacts as respectively argued by all three respondents of the schools involved. This means that all the Visual Arts products of the three schools have been impacted with the needed prerequisite skills for further education or self-employment even if they terminate their education at that level. This is consistent with the curricular arrangements of the

Visual Arts programme (CRDD, 2010). This convincingly makes the Visual Arts programme a choice-worthy for all Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region.

However, the total number of graduates churned out by the three Senior High Schools - *SHS-VAP1* (297 graduates); *SHS-VAP2* (258 graduates), and *SHS-VAP3* (238 graduates) offering Visual Arts programme in the Upper West Region of Ghana in the five -years period (2016-2020) equals 798 graduates. This means that for the entire five-year period, only 798 Visual Arts graduates were produced in the Upper West Region through the Senior High School system. This figure is woefully inadequate and suggests that the numerous concrete job opportunities and the accrued economic prospects of the Creative Arts (Myerscough, 1988; Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies, 2010 – 2016; Reeves, 2002; Essel, 2013; Ukwa & Okolie, 2014; Joshua, 2015; Essel, Navei, Quarshie & Donkoh, 2020; A New Approach, 2020; Liang & Wang, 2020) would continue to evade the good people of the Upper West Region and Ghana by extension. These low figures could be turned around if the Senior High Schools which are not currently offering Visual Arts subjects in the region start mounting the programme in those schools and further admit students to study same. By so doing, the benefits of the programme as illustrated by the authors would be realised.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Pivoted on the significant contributions of the Creative Arts sector to national development, the study adopted an inquiry approach to ascertain the popularity of the Visual Arts Programme in Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana. It was established that only three (3) out of thirty-three (33) Senior High Schools (labeled as *SHS-VAP1*, *SHS-VAP2* & *SHS-VAP3*) offered the Visual Arts programme in the Upper West Region of Ghana. Therefore, the Visual Arts programme is tenuously unpopular in Senior High Schools in the Upper West Region of Ghana. However, four (4) of the 30 non-Visual Arts schools in the region which attributed their delay in the introduction of the programme to constraints of resources (human & material) have expressed interest in mounting the programme soon with two of them already offering GKA as an optional elective subject for Home Economics students. The remaining twenty-six (26) schools have however remained silent on the introduction of the Visual Arts programme in their respective schools. It is therefore recommended that the four (4) schools which expressed interest in introducing Visual Arts should expedite action to have the programme introduced in their respective schools within the shortest possible time. The other remaining Senior High Schools which were silent on the introduction of the Visual Arts programme in the Upper West Region of Ghana should now see the need to introduce the programme in due course for the Upper West Region to reap the employment and economic benefits of the programme.

In addition to creative skills impartation, the Visual Arts candidates of the three schools (*SHS-VAP1*, *SHS-VAP2* & *SHS-VAP3*) who sat for WASSCE between 2016 and 2020 in the Upper West Region variously excelled in their respective Visual Arts elective subjects. It is recommended that the schools involved should continue to produce such remarkable academic performances in future West Africa Senior School Certificate Examinations with emphasis placed on skills acquisition. This would significantly entice non-Visual Arts schools in the Upper West Region to see the need in mounting the programme in their respective schools without further delay. Also, the heads of the three schools offering Visual Arts programme should initiate deliberate public sensitisation drives during meetings of the Parents Teachers Association and also resort to the mass media to educate parents, Junior High School students, and others on the prospects of the Visual Arts programme. This would significantly lead to many BECE candidates opting for the programme at the Senior High School level. This has become necessary since the schools are challenged with low enrolments for the Visual Arts programme leading to a total cumulative figure of 798 Visual Arts graduates produced by all three Senior High Schools from 2016 to 2020. This figure is woefully inadequate and suggests that the numerous concrete job opportunities and the accrued economic prospects of the Creative Arts (Art Education) would not be felt by the good people of the Upper West Region of Ghana as expected.

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