

Factors that Influence Girl Students' Choice of Elective Visual Arts Subjects as an Academic Discipline

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Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to examine factors that influence girl students' choice of elective Visual Arts Subjects. The study adopted descriptive research design. The population of the study consisted of senior high schools, teachers, and students from Ashanti Region. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the schools, teachers and students for the study. The two main instruments used for data collection were questionnaire and observation. The data gathered from the observations during the period were transferred into the word processed document on computer and used to support data collected for study. The questionnaire and the observations were collated into individual reports. The study indicated that there is gap between boys and girls in Visual Arts education, leading to the inability for majority of girls to match the boys boot for boot in practical lessons. It is recommended that, Visual Arts female teachers should practice their art to encourage their students to be confident by infusing the "can-do-spirit" in them to help them develop the drive to achieve and believe that achievement is possible for them. Teachers should also be encouraged to redefine their attitudes towards their profession and to develop love, passion and commitment for effective teaching and learning. It is also recommended that, more female Visual Arts teachers should be employed by the GES so as to provide the female students with more than enough female role models in other to help boost their confidence up.

Keywords:

Gender, Visual Arts, Academic Discipline

1. Introduction

In our ever growing industrialised and technological society, there is the urgent need to generate a learning system that will not just give knowledge to individuals but

also the necessary skills to develop the right values and attitudes. Creative Arts and Design education is to guide the learner to acquire 21st century skills of communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, personal development and leadership, cultural identity and global citizenship, creativity and innovation, digital literacy, financial literacy, open-mindedness, etc., on one hand, and instill the nation's core values of honesty, integrity, cooperation, perseverance and grit, teamwork, respect for others and responsible citizenry on the other [1].

Visual Arts education in Ghana occurs at secondary and tertiary levels. The secondary level programme is offered in Senior High Schools (SHS). In the SHS, Visual Arts is an alternative option to Home Economics, both of which constitute the Vocational Skills programme. The Visual Arts curriculum involves specialized studies in eight elective subjects - Sculpture, Ceramics, Graphic Design, Picture Making, Textiles, Jewellery, Leatherwork, Basketry, and General Knowledge in Art, which is a compulsory subject [2,3]. According to the Teaching Syllabus for Visual Arts, the programme has been designed to provide its students with adequate foundation knowledge and skills for further education in the respective elective subjects as well as for self-employment or apprenticeship in the respective subjects for those terminating their education at SHS [4].

The Visual Arts Teaching Syllabus also categorizes the elective subjects as either two or three-dimensional (2-D or 3-D) art forms. Subjects classified as 2-Ds comprise Graphic Design, Picture Making and Textiles while Sculpture, Ceramics, Jewellery, Basketry and Leatherwork constitute the 3-Ds. Siaw (2009) reports that each student is required to opt to study three electives: two from the 2-D category and one from the 3-D category, in addition to General Knowledge in Art, which is a core subject and therefore studied by all students on the Visual Arts programme. The study of these subjects over three years leads to the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), which provides access to higher education and the job market. Though schools offering Visual Arts are mandated to offer at least, two elective subjects, fulfilling this requirement depends largely on availability of specialist teachers, requisite studio facilities, tools, equipment and relevant raw materials and by inference, not all the schools are able to offer a wide selection of electives to enable every student satisfy their needs [5]. Subject "choice" is therefore almost always limited by the range of subjects that a school offers and by implication, the scope of technical and creative skills students opting for Visual Arts can attain. It is also important to emphasize that the subjects that students choose to study in their senior secondary years have a major influence on their educational and career options after they leave school. The compulsory General Knowledge in Art (GKA) is a peculiar subject with its own challenges. The 2008 Teaching Syllabus describes GKA as a composite subject that was teased out from all the Visual Arts subjects studied at the SHS level and intended to provide information in the history of art, creativity and appreciation, the elements and principles of art, and skills in their application to various practical art processes. Like the elective subjects, GKA comprises both theory and practical topics. The theory is meant to widen the students' scope of art vocabulary in order to equip them with the requisite communication skills that would enable them to talk knowledgeably on art. The practical components are to reinforce what is learned in the individual subject areas. Unlike the elective Visual Arts subjects, however, this composite subject has no specialist teachers, implying that all Visual Arts teachers are competent enough to teach all aspects of GKA very effectively [6]. Besides, the teaching of GKA is also guided by a single textbook (General

Knowledge in Art for Senior Secondary Schools) that has not been revised since being published [7]. The teaching of GKA therefore depends on the knowledge, resourcefulness, ingenuity and goodwill of teachers who have responsibility for the subject in the various schools. Although Visual Arts has the ability to directly translate secondary education into a consistently economic return, Ghana cannot fully benefit from the creativity of its citizens as long as Visual Arts and the technical / vocational sub-sector of the nation's public educational system is poorly resourced and therefore unable to positively impact on access or human capital development for economic growth [8,9].

The various disciplines or subjects which come under the Visual Art programme are Basketry, Ceramics, Graphic Design, Leatherwork, Picture making, Sculpture, Textiles and General Knowledge in Art. Apart from the General Knowledge in Art, which is compulsory for every visual art student, each student is expected to study any two subjects (elective) so as to gain enough exposure in variety of skills and career opportunities in future.

General Knowledge in Art: It is one of the Visual Art subjects that provides broad-based information in the history of art, creativity, and appreciation, and teaches basic elements and principles of art as well as skills in their application to various practical art processes. What it seeks to provide is the acquisition of knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes in visual arts for individual and national development.

Basketry: It is the art of making baskets and other articles such as mats, trays, etc; with Materials such as cans, palm leaves, bamboo, raffia, rattan etc. by way of weaving, plaiting, knotting, coiling and looping.

Ceramics: Ceramics is concerned with objects made of clay such as tiles, vases, pots, which are made hard by firing at a very high temperature.

Graphic Design: It is one of the components of visual art that uses drawing, paintings, printmaking, and typographic designs as a means of visual communication. Examples of Graphic art products are poster, banner, billboard, label etc.

Leatherwork: It involves the art of turning animal skin into leather for the production of variety of products such as footwear, bags, belts, book covers among others. Leather comes in the form of natural and artificial ones known as Leatherette.

Picture making: Is the art of arranging images or elements of design on two dimensional surfaces for the purpose of having aesthetic value. It comes in the form of drawing, painting, collage, mosaic, montage and printmaking.

Sculpture: Is the art of creating forms in three dimensions or relief. Sculpture has two basic techniques. These are modeling and carving. Sculpture can be divided into three major forms; intaglio, relief, and sculpture in the round.

Textiles: It is a general term for fibres, yarns and other materials that can be made into fabrics and for fabrics produced by interlacing or any method of decorating fabrics [9].

The objectives of Visual Art Programme set out by the Ministry of Education and Curriculum Research and Development Division of Ghana Education Centre in the Visual Arts Syllabus for Senior High Schools are as follows:

- To foster and promote creativity by helping students to think, act, and feel creatively through a variety of art activities using tools and materials.

- To demonstrate Art as an integral part of human living.
- To inculcate in the students, the need to appreciate the value of their own Arts so as to arouse pride, confidence, and patriotism.
- To acquire knowledge and understanding of the meaning, significance, and role of Art in socio-economic development.
- To acquire perceptual and analytical skills through Art experience as well as self-expression and communication skills through response to Art in the students.
- To provide cognitive, psychomotor, and affective mode of development as a result of the theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and visual thinking in Art.
- To promote skills in the development of indigenous Art technologies, aesthetics, beliefs, values, and attitude.
- To provide competencies in Art and help students to apply their skills to national development [4].

Creative Arts and Design (CAD) teachers are expected to recognise each learner's unique ability and put in place appropriate teaching and learning strategies to meet the unique need of the individual learner. The approach is not a "one size fits all" because each learner has distinct skills, talents and capabilities. This approach calls for the use of a range of different pedagogical approaches that seek to address the needs of individual learners. The Creative Arts Design (CAD) curriculum is aimed at developing individuals who are literate, good problem solvers, have the ability to think creatively and have both the confidence and competence to participate fully in Ghanaian society as responsible local and global citizens. The subject aims to:

- Educate the learner in Art and through Arts (head, heart and hands or 3-H Therapy).
- Develop the learners' thinking capacity, reasoning power and an understanding of the world and its cultures.
- Provide learners with the opportunity to respond and act creatively according to intuition.
- Instils in the learner a lifelong critical mind: analytical and problem solving skills, creative and innovative skills.
- Develop the emotional, material, spiritual, cultural and intellectual life of an individual.
- Strengthen the power of imagination, creative thinking and self-expression.
- Predispose the learner to technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills needed for industrialization.
- Develop in the learner the skill of appreciation and appraisal of the creative arts and the artists /artistes [1].

The study of Visual Arts comprises subjects in two-dimensional and three-dimensional (2-D and 3-D) art forms. Subjects which constitute the 2-Ds include Graphic Design, Textiles and Picture Making. On the other hand, subjects that constitute the 3-Ds comprise of Basketry, Leatherwork, Sculpture, Ceramics and Jewelry. The teaching syllabus for Visual Arts reports that each student is expected to offer three arts subjects: General Knowledge in Art which is compulsory and two

other art subjects; one from the 2-D and the other from the 3-D groups. Fulfillment of this requirement depends largely on availability of specialist teachers, requisite studio facilities, tools, equipment and relevant raw materials and all the schools being able to offer a wide range of electives that will enable every student to satisfy their learning needs. The selection or choice of a particular subject is always limited by the range of subjects offered in a school and this hinders the scope of what technical and creative skills students opting for Visual Arts can attain. It is worthy to note that subjects that students study at the senior high school impact on their educational and career options after completing school [5]. There is therefore the need for study to find out girl students' choice of elective Visual Arts Subjects in the senior high schools in Ghana. The study was guided by this research question - Which factors influence students' choice of elective Visual Arts Subjects in those schools?

2. Materials and Methods

The study adopted descriptive research design. The population of the study consisted of senior high schools, teachers, and students from Ashanti Region. Table 1 shows a detailed description of the population for the study.

Table 1. Target Population for the Study.

School	Population of teachers		Class of students	Population of students	
	Male	Female		Male	Female
A	5	2	SHS 1	0	36
			2	0	24
			3	0	18
B	4	0	1	32	0
			2	27	0
			3	20	0
C	3	1	1	20	12
			2	26	8
			3	23	5
D	4	1	1	23	14
			2	22	6
			3	15	9
TOTAL	16	4		208	132

Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the schools, teachers and students for the study. Four Senior High Schools were purposively. Respondents in four selected SHS which consist of two single sex and two co-educational Senior High Schools in Ashanti Region formed the population of the study. Simple random sampling was used to select 10 Visual Arts Teachers and 170 Visual out of 20 teachers and 340 students respectively. The sex distribution of student respondents as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Sex Distribution of Visual Arts Students' Respondents by School.

School	Class/level	Population of students	
		Male	Female
A	1	0	18
	2	0	12
	3	0	9
B	1	16	0
	2	13	0
	3	10	0
C	1	10	6

	2	13	4
	3	11	3
D	1	11	7
	2	11	3
	3	8	5
TOTAL		103	67

The two main instruments used for data collection were questionnaire and observation. The questionnaires were sorted and grouped according to SHS teachers and students and coded according to their responses. The data gathered from the observations during the period were transferred into the word processed document on computer and used to support data collected for study. The questionnaire and the observations were collated into individual reports.

3. Results and Discussion

This section of the study presents results and discussion on factors that influence girl students' choice of elective Visual Arts Subjects as an academic discipline.

3.1. Lessons in Sculpture

The lessons observed were carving and modeling in Schools B, C and D, because these were the only schools which offered sculpture. It was observed that few females were in the classrooms studying sculpture. These girls were normally seen asking for assistance from the boys, were too slow in delivering and were so careful not to get hurt in the practical class. Information gathered at the time of the observation revealed that most of the female students who enrolled to study sculpture later transferred to the home economics class because they found it difficult competing with the boys and also had the perception that due to the heavy weights of objects which could damage their palms and the hard work involved in the production process, "sculpture was a subject for boys only". No wonder the only female single sex school was not offering sculpture to the Visual Arts students. This showed a clear sign of lack of confidence on the part of the girls and moreover, all the lessons were taught by male teachers which also indicates the lack of female role models for these girls to emulate from. It was also realized that sculpture was more male friendly.

3.2. Lessons in Ceramics

Schools A, C and D were visited for the observation on the lessons, preparation and treatment of clay. It was observed that these classes had more girls than that of the sculpture class. However, many girls were seen participating more in the less stressful activities such as fetching of water and sieving of the clay whilst the boy were seriously engaged in the pounding and mixing. Moreover, during the process of kneading and wedging, majority of the girls had aprons on and were very careful in handling the clay because they did not want to stain their uniforms. Whiles the boys confidently cut the clay and hit one on top of the other, the girls were rather calling for assistance however, when it got to the turn of kneading, they were involved.

3.3. Lessons in Textiles

The lessons observed included batik and tie-and-dye in schools A and C. These lessons were all taught by female teachers. It was observed that in each of the class, the students had been billed and been provided with all the necessary materials. During the process of tying in the tie-and-dye class, the girls found it easy to tie the

fabric given them while the few boys were found struggling. After dyeing the fabrics and realizing its effect after untying the knots, they were very happy and wanted to do more. In the batik class, the boys were rather able to draw wonderful images with the wax on the fabrics while the girls resorted to the drawing of simple geometric shapes and spattering of wax on the fabric before dyeing. Textiles seemed to be one of the female friendly courses because of the ease with which the girls carried out their activities.

3.4. Lessons in Graphic Design

Calligraphy and packaging were the lessons observed in school B and D. All lessons were taught by male teachers. These classes also had higher male population than female. In the calligraphy class the girls could hardly write at the angle of 45°. They had to be assisted by the teacher and other boys in the class. However, some of them were able to rub shoulder to shoulder with the boys.

The altitude of the girls in school A during the packaging lesson was quite different. The girls were very excited because they realized they could send the product home and either use or give them out as gifts to others. It was observed that in the course of production, these girls handled the tools with great care just to avoid injuries. Also, their designs on the packages had very simple but beautiful shapes with floral designs.

3.4. Lessons in Picture Making

Three different lessons were observed in Schools B, C and D. These lessons were on figure drawing, collage and montage respectively. The figure drawing lesson observed in school D showed great signs of interest on the faces of the few girls who were in the class as they laughed at one another because they could hardly draw properly on their own. However, there was an exceptional girl who could draw better than majority of the boys. It was observed that with a little assistance from their teacher or a skilled colleague, the girls began to do better than before. This is a clear indication that if they are given more tuition and attention, they can perform better.

Moreover, the teaching of collage in School C revealed that the students had a problem with drawing but showed great interest in the process of cutting and sticking the odds and ends on the plywood. The few girls were assisted by the boys in composing their scenes after which they were left alone to continue. However, the girls were also found assisting the boys in creating folds in the stacked clothes.

Also, the lesson observed in School was taught to Form Two students. The behaviour of the girls were similar to that of those in school C. They loved the whole idea of cutting and sticking. As such they easily carried out their task. However, some of the girls were reluctant to scrape portions of their work which did not go well when asked by their teacher.

3.5. Lessons in Leather Work

The lessons observed were production of wallet and dressing bag in Schools A and B. The dressing bag was taught in school A by a female teacher whilst the wallet was taught by a male teacher in school B. It was noticed that those lessons had been carefully selected to suit the gender of the students because both schools were single sex schools. As a result, the students were seen to be very happy as they carried out their designs and production. Each student in school A was seen trying to create something unique while the majority of the designs done by the boys in school B

followed the same pattern. Majority of the students in both schools had all the necessary tool and materials to carry out their task whereas the few who did not have waited for others to finish using a tool before borrowing. It was also observed that the finished works of the students in school A were aesthetically appealing than those by students in school B.

Table 3 shows the spread of students on the various Visual Arts Elective subjects offered in the four schools. It is evident that students in School A specializes in Graphic Design, Textiles, Ceramics and Leather works. Students in school B also specialize in Picture Making, Graphics, Leather and Sculpture, whereas School C and D specialized in Picture Making, Textiles, Ceramics and Sculpture. The figures in Table 3 also show that subject areas where boys showed interest in pursuing were the very subjects where most girls also frowned upon. For instance, in areas such as Sculpture, there were 62 boys (representing 87%) as against 9 girls (representing 13%). Other include Picture Making (84% boys as against 16% girls), graphics (60% boys as against 40% girls) and ceramics (57% boys as against 43% girls). This presupposes that these subject areas are more male friendly than female simply because they involve a lot of risk by the use of sharp tools and lifting of heavy materials and tools, more skills, energy and effort and are dirt related.

Table 3. Sex Distribution of Student Respondents on the Various Visual Arts Disciplines.

School	Two Dimensional Art						Three Dimensional					
	Picture Making		Graphics		Textiles		Ceramics		Leather Works		Sculpture	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A	0	0	0	12	0	27	0	22	0	17	0	0
B	21	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	23	0
C	21	7	0	0	13	6	12	9	0	0	22	4
D	14	4	0	0	16	11	13	10	0	0	17	5
TOTAL	56	11	18	12	29	44	55	41	16	17	62	9

On the other hand, Table 3 also shows that more girls offer Textiles and Leather works. Out of the total of 73 students offering Textiles, 60% are females and 51% of the 33 Leather work respondents were females. Textiles emerged the most preferred elective subject by the girls because it involves “girl-friendly” skills and offers “female-appropriate” occupations. This study affirms assertion of a previous research that women in Ghana prefer work which is respected and valued by the community as women’s work, most of which are, extensions of female domestic activities [10]. Textiles-with-Graphic Design elective combination facilitates access into the fashion industry but many girls shun Picture-Making because girls generally lack the level of drawing skills required; Ceramics is “girl-friendly” except that the girls felt it was dirty to touch and could easily dirty the clothes [11].

Moreover, as shown in Table 3, schools A and B are single sex schools (A = all girls and B = all boys) while schools C and D are mixed schools. The sex distribution of student respondents as shown on Table 2 clearly indicates a gender imbalance among sexes being in favour of boys. The population of male student respondents of 103 (representing 61%) as against female student respondents of 67 (representing 39%) as showed on Table 2 could be ascribed to as a reflection of their teachers’ gender population. This is so because Table 1 shows a high male Visual Arts teacher population of 16 (representing 80%) as against the female Visual Arts teacher population of 4 (representing 20%) which truly affirms assertion that the lack of female teachers in a school is a missed opportunity to provide meaningful professional female role models to young girls [8]. However, the presence of female

teachers in a subject area can help make the school environment a safer place for girls and help boost their confidence in the subject, simply because, the girls can also have female role models, people who can better understand their plight and fight for their interest.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study indicated that there is gap between boys and girls in Visual Arts education, leading to the inability for majority of girls to match the boys boot for boot in practical lessons. It is recommended that, Visual Arts female teachers should practice their art to encourage their students to be confident by infusing the “can-do-spirit” in them to help them develop the drive to achieve and believe that achievement is possible for them. Teachers should also be encouraged to redefine their attitudes towards their profession and to develop love, passion and commitment for effective teaching and learning. It is also recommended that, more female Visual Arts teachers should be employed by the GES so as to provide the female students with more than enough female role models in other to help boost their confidence up.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement

Data is available on request from the corresponding author.

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