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# Factors Influencing the Preference of Graphic Design as a Visual Art Subject in Second Cycle and Tertiary Educational Institutions in Ghana

Gbadegbe Richard Selase<sup>\*</sup>, Quashie Mawuli, Amewu Joseph, Kofi Sarfo

Department of Industrial Art, Ho Technical University, Ho, Ghana

**Email address:**

richotat@yahoo.com (G. R. Selase)

<sup>\*</sup>Corresponding author

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**Abstract:** Visual Art Education in Ghana and the world over has been structured to give a holistic training to the student with emphasis on hands on practical skills acquisition. It focuses on creativity and innovativeness towards the production of high quality artefacts to fulfill societal needs. It is line with this mandate that the Visual Art curriculum has been crafted to refine and train students in the various art disciplines such as Textiles, Sculpture, Ceramics, Leather Work, Jewellery, Basketry and Graphic Design, just to mention a few. However, certain developments in recent times militate against the realization of this mandate. The craze for Graphic Design at the expense of other art subjects has almost reached its peak. 8 out of every 10 Visual Art students in the Tertiary and Senior High Schools prefer to offer Graphic Design. This unfortunate development has left most of the other art related subjects with few students. In most of the Senior High Schools in Ghana, the other art subjects have been scrapped leaving Graphic Design, General Knowledge in Art and a 3 dimensional art subject as the (subject combination). As a result, most of the teachers who teach the other art related subjects have become redundant except a few who teach General Knowledge in Art. This study was therefore carried out to investigate the cause of the problem and to proffer solutions. The study adopted the Purposive Sampling Technique. The sample population was made up of two-hundred and ten (210) respondents. The main research tools employed to collect data for the study were questionnaire and interview. A major finding of the study is that most respondents prefer Graphic Design because of its computer relatedness, general appeal and employment prospects. The study recommends that ICT should be incorporated into the curriculum of all art related subjects as well as rebranding of the other art subjects such as Sculpture, Leather Work and Basketry to be more attractive and appealing.

**Keywords:** Visual Art, ICT, Graphic Design, Curriculum and 3 Dimensional Art

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## 1. Introduction

The educational system of any nation is a mirror through which the image of the nation can be seen, and shaped. Education has been and will continue to be the potential cause of change in any society. Education is also meant to develop manpower for different levels of the economy, which is an ultimate guarantee of national self-reliance. Agyei et al, [1]. According to Mbahi [2], education is not only the greatest force that can be used to bring about redress, but it is also an investment which the nation makes for the quick

development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources. Gbadegbe and Quashie [3] state that education is considered to be the bed-rock of development of any nation; hence the call by governments for “education for all”.

Technical skills are indispensable tools for development so any country that aspires to develop technologically must develop its technical and vocational education as a prerequisite for enhancing the skills of her citizens (Laing, [4a]). Making reference to the rapid development of Korea, Singapore and the other industrialized Asian nations, Laing

[4b] exhorts nations to adopt policies that are based on technical and vocational education to train a highly skilled workforce to support economic development.

The importance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in nation building cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, technical and vocational education is a major agent for industrial development as well as for social progress of any country. Without skilled technical manpower produced by the polytechnics, technical and vocational institutes for industry, commerce and agriculture, national development would virtually grind to a standstill. (Budu-Smith [5]). In Ghana, the case for education, especially Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), is overwhelming both in terms of fulfilling human security and as an investment with very high returns.

According to Nsiah-Gyabaah [6a], 'there has never really been any argument over the link between education and development because education helps to build national capacity to apply science and technology to social and economic problems'. Education is a fundamental human right and it is necessary for socio-economic development of society. It is a means to the fulfillment of an individual and the transfer of values from one generation to the next. Technical and Vocational Education and Training is a fundamental element in the development equation because it allows individuals and societies to unlock their potentials, expand their horizons and adapt to the changes in the dynamic world. (Nsiah-Gyabaah [6b]).

Basically, the purpose of technical and vocational education is to equip young men and women with the technical and professional skills needed for socio-economic development of the country. The emphasis is on training people for self-employment. The Government has, in recent times, given renewed recognition to the TVET sub-sector and has identified it as one of its priorities for addressing poverty alleviation. It has accordingly highlighted TVET in its Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategic (GPRS) document in that regard. The Government also recognizes the strengthening of TVET as a means of developing the technical and skilled human resource base which Ghana needs urgently as a key strategy for rapid economic growth and for realizing the Ghana vision 2020 plan. In line with this realization, one of the basic philosophies and orientations of Ghana's vision 2020 plan is to reform all Technical/Vocational Education systems to make it more responsive to the national goals and aspirations as well as local and global demands.

An area of the technical and vocational sub-sector which has assumed prominence is Visual Art. The Visual Art programme is a significant aspect of the vocational skill programme in the Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) programme in Ghana. The ongoing reforms in the Ghana educational system have run for almost 12 years. People from all walks of life including teachers, politicians and parents have contended that some aspects of the reform like the duration, of the Senior Secondary School programme and the quality of education at all levels are to be looked into. (Antwi-Boadi [7])

Ghana has made much effort over the years to infuse the general school curriculum with vocation oriented subjects that will equip the youth with entrepreneurial, productive and employable skills so they can function effectively in the global economy. (Anthony, [8]). Ghana's strategy for nurturing vocational skills among the citizens has focused on training students to become enterprising so they can adapt to the demands of a global knowledge-based economy that is driven by science and technology. (Danso-Sintim [9]).

This seems to be the basis of the series of educational reforms that Ghana has implemented since the 1960s which included the introduction of the Continuation School Scheme into the then middle school curriculum to orient adolescent students to vocational and technical education based on the arts practised in the various communities, using master craftsmen in the local communities as resource persons. This philosophy underlined the 1987 education reforms which included Visual Arts as a vocational education programme to foster national creativity through the school system. (UNESCO, [10]).

The 2008 Education Reforms in Ghana also reinforces the purpose for including Visual Arts, Home Economics and other technical skills oriented subjects in the secondary school curriculum as the development of creative citizens for the socio-economic development of the nation. Currently, Visual Arts and Home Economics constitute the two options of the Vocational Skills programme of the Senior High School (SHS) elective curriculum (Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare, [11]), which are taught independent of each other. This means that students who decide to pursue Vocational Skills education at SHS can only offer Visual Arts or Home Economics, and not both. However, Home Economics students can choose to study General Knowledge in Art (GKA) as their elective subject even though GKA is a core subject for Visual Arts students (Agbenatoo, [12]; Osei-Mensah, [13]). No Visual Arts student studies any Home Economics subject as their elective.

The vocational skills programme consists of Home Economics and the Visual arts. It plays a unique role in making a positive contribution to the development of human resource in the country, by directing its attention not only to the teaching of art but also producing craftsmen who are provided with practical, theoretical and historical education in the Visual Arts. Visual Arts is a very important subject in the school curriculum. In the Senior High School, the Visual Arts programme is divided into nine specialized areas which include General Knowledge in Art, a subject which is compulsory for all Visual Arts students. Students offering other disciplines like General Arts and the Sciences can choose it as elective subject. Two elective subjects are chosen to supplement the General Knowledge in Art. They are selected from Picture Making, Ceramics, Basketry, Leather making, Jewellery, Textiles, Sculpture and Graphic Design.

The Visual Art programme is considered an important discipline because it is taught with the aim of helping develop creativity in human beings. It also helps students to discover in their environment, tools and materials for the

execution of artefacts. Skill acquisition is another rationale for learning the Visual Arts. Herbert Read rightly asserts "Visual Art education trains a total man. It trains the head, the heart and the hand. The desirable effects of the Visual Arts programme cannot be overemphasized. In fact the Visual Art programme has been designed to train man power for the various industries in the field of textiles, picture making, ceramics, sculpture, jewellery and graphic design.

The Ministry of Education SHS Visual Arts Syllabi is well intended as vocations with specialized fields in art, in response to overarching craft industry and tertiary educational structure into which its products would enter. The syllabi covers a 3-year SHS Visual Arts programme administered through the numerous Senior High Schools (SHSs) which specialize in part or the entire curricula.

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 (Evans-Solomon, [14]; Asihene, [15]).

According to the Curriculum Research and Development Division's Teaching Syllabus for Visual Arts [16], 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.

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 [17] 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.

The current Education Reform in Visual Arts has made it obligatory for Visual Art students to select one 2D subject and a 3D subject in addition to General Knowledge in Art (GKA) which is compulsory. But when it comes to the selection of 2D subject in the Senior High School, Graphic Design is mostly selected at the expense of other 2D subjects such as Textiles and Picture Making. In tertiary institutions offering Visual Art such as Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Takoradi Technical University, Ho Technical University, University of Education, Winneba, Tamale Technical University, Bolgatanga Polytechnic and Wa Polytechnic, students who opt for Graphic Design are always in the majority. In Ho Technical University for instance, out

of fifty-four (54) Second year Industrial Art students, as much as 39 opted for Graphic Design while two (2) students opted for Ceramics, four (4) opted for Textiles, three (3) opted for Sculpture and six (6) opted for Painting.

This development if not nipped in the bud can lead to the redundancy of lecturers and teachers who teach the so-called less endowed subjects. Quite apart from that, the other subject areas which are equally important in nation building will lack the needed human man power as a result of low student enrollment. This will eventually lead to scarcity of skills in those areas. In contrast, the situation can lead to the proliferation of way-side Graphic design Shops which will undoubtedly compromise on quality. If the necessary measures are not taken by the educational authorities to change the status quo, the less endowed subject areas will become completely extinct. This study has therefore been embarked upon to investigate the causes of the waxing interest of Visual Art students in Ghana for Graphic Design at the expense other Visual Art subjects.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This section of the study outlines the various methods adopted by the researchers to collect, process and analyze data. The section is subdivided into the following headings: research design, population for the study, sampling technique and data collection procedures.

### 2.1. Research Design

The descriptive (qualitative) method was adopted to describe, explain and validate data collected for the study. This is buttressed by Fox and Bayat [18] as follows: "three main purposes of descriptive studies can be explained as describing, explaining and validating research findings". According to Ethridge [19], descriptive research can be explained as a statement of affairs as they are at present with the researcher having no control over the variable. He further opines that, "descriptive studies may be characterized as simply the attempt to determine, describe or identify what an entity is.

### 2.2. Population of the Study

A research population is generally a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific query. (Explorable.com, [20]). The population of the study is made up of seven-hundred (700) respondents. This comprises Tertiary students, Senior High School students, Textiles lecturers of a university in Ho and Textiles tutors in selected Senior High Schools in Ghana.

### 2.3. Sampling Technique

A sample is a group of people, objects, or items that are taken from a larger population for measurement (Education Centre, [21]). Considering the objective and nature of the study, the Purposive Sampling method was adopted. According to Crossman [22], a purposive sample is a non-

probability sample that is selected based on the characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. Accordingly, a sample size of two-hundred and ten (210) respondents, representing 30% of the total population was chosen for the study. The reason for this choice was that the resources for the study could not go beyond 30% of the total population for the study. Besides, Leedy [23] asserts that for quality research, at least 30% of the accessible population for the study is a fair representation for an acceptable accuracy of results. The table below shows the breakdown of the sample population.

*Table 1. Break down of Sample Population.*

Sample Population	Number	Percentage (%)
Tertiary students	60	28.6
Senior High Students	150	71.4
Total	210	100

**2.4. Data Collection Procedures**

Two main data collection tools were used to collect data for the study. These are questionnaire and interview.

**2.4.1. Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is defined as a research instrument that consists of a set of questions or other types of prompts that aims to collect information from a respondent. (Adi, [24]). The questionnaire (survey) approach was employed by the researchers to collect credible information from respondents. The questionnaire combined the open-ended and close-ended question types. The questions bothered on the demographic orientation of the respondents, the main reasons which contributed to the research problem and its setting as well as the solutions thereof. In all, two-hundred and ten (210) questionnaire copies were administered to the respondents. There was one-hundred percent (100%) retrieval of the questionnaires.

**2.4.2. Interview**

Interview which is more or less an oral questionnaire was employed by the researchers to extract pertinent information from respondents. This research tool was employed to seek clarification on some relevant questions which were obtained through the administration of questionnaire. This was done by the preparation of an interview guide. A semi-structured interview type was adopted which combined the structured and unstructured interview types.

**3. Analysis and Interpretation of Results**

This section of the paper presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected for the study. The data for the study was synthesized, coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) in the form of tables. Table 2 below presents the gender distribution of respondents. It is evident from the result that 75.7% of the respondents are male while 24.3% of the respondents are female. This indicates the male dominance of both

Tertiary and SHS art students who participated in the study.

*Table 2. Gender Distribution.*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	159	75.7	75.7	75.7
	Female	51	24.3	24.3	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data September 2019.

The table below displays information on the age distribution of respondents. As many as 159 (75.7%) of respondents fell within the age range of 15-20 while 51 (24.3%) of the respondents belong to the age range of 21-30. This result shows that the respondents from tertiary and SHS who participated in the study belong to the youthful age.

*Table 3. Age Distribution.*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15-20	159	75.7	75.7	75.7
	21-30	51	24.3	24.3	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data September 2019.

In table 4 below, the educational level of respondents has been displayed. It is clear from the results that majority of respondents (70.5%) are Visual Art students from selected Senior High Schools in the Ho Municipality of Ghana while 29.5% of the respondents are selected Industrial Art students from a University in Ho.

*Table 4. Educational Level.*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SHS	148	70.5	70.5	70.5
	Tertiary	62	29.5	29.5	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data September 2019.

In table 5, the results obtained after quizzing respondents about their most preferred art subject is presented. The results are quite revealing. As many as 152 respondents representing 72.4% of the sample population mentioned graphic design, 22 respondents representing 10.5% of the sample population stated picture making. Meanwhile, 16 respondents representing 7.6% of the sample population mentioned jewellery while 12 respondents representing 5.7% of the sample population listed textiles as the art subject they preferred. In addition, 7 respondents representing 3.3% of the sample population mentioned sculpture while only 1 respondent representing 0.5% of the sample population mentioned leather work. These results go a long way to strengthen the hypothesis of the paper.

*Table 5. Most preferred Art subject.*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	textiles	12	5.7	5.7	5.7
	graphic design	152	72.4	72.4	78.1
	sculpture	7	3.3	3.3	81.4
	jewellery	16	7.6	7.6	89.0
	leather	1	.5	.5	89.5
	Picture making	22	10.5	10.5	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data September 2019.

Table 6 located below presents the test results obtained from respondents after asking them to state some of the reasons for which they prefer Graphic Design to other art subjects. The results are as follows: most of the respondents (36.7%) stated that personal interest was the main factor which influenced their preference for Graphic Design. Also, computer relatedness of Graphic Design was one of the reasons stated by respondents as influencing their choice of Graphic Design. This constitutes 21.9% of the sample population. Surprisingly, the pressure from parents to pursue Graphic Design was ranked high (12.9%) by respondents as being one of the key factors which influences their preference for Graphic Design. Meanwhile, 7.6% of the sample population stated strongly that the perceived lucrative nature of Graphic Design was a factor they considered in

selecting Graphic Design as their life-time profession. Interestingly, 5.2% of the respondents were of the view that Graphic Design is not as difficult as other art subjects and that this was the main reason they considered in selecting Graphic Design as their preferred subject. Additionally, discouragement of teachers from pursuing other art subjects was ranked low as this constitutes only 3.8% of the sample population. Also, another 3.8% of the respondents mentioned the great demand for Graphic Design professionals as one of the reasons they consider while 3.3% of the respondents stated that the study of Graphic Design is less expensive. Only 2.9% of the respondents consented to the ready market for Graphic Design products while just 1.9% of the respondents mentioned the employability of Graphic Design as one of the reasons for their preference.

*Table 6. Reasons for Preference of Graphic Design.*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	One can easily be employed	4	1.9	1.9	1.9
	It is a less difficult subject to study	11	5.2	5.2	7.1
	The study of Graphic Design is less expensive	7	3.3	3.3	10.5
	I have personal interest in Graphic Design	77	36.7	36.7	47.1
	Discouragement from teachers for pursuing other art options	8	3.8	3.8	51.0
	Pressure from parents to pursue Graphic Design	27	12.9	12.9	63.8
	Graphic Design is the most lucrative among all the art subjects	16	7.6	7.6	71.4
	Great demand for Graphic Designers	8	3.8	3.8	75.2
	Computer relatedness makes Graphic Design is more attractive	46	21.9	21.9	97.1
	There is ready market for Graphic Design products	6	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data September 2019.

In table 7 below, the views of respondents on how to solve the problem of high preference for Graphic Design at the expense of other equally important art subjects such as, Picture Making, Sculpture, Ceramics, Textiles, Painting, Leather Work, Basketry and Jewellery were sought.

The results reveal that majority of respondents (27.6%) were of the view that ICT should be introduced into the curriculum of all art related subjects and courses in the Senior High Schools and Tertiary institutions across the country. As high as 19% of the respondents suggested that in order to solve the problem of the over dependence on Graphic Design, art teachers should take it upon themselves to educate art students on the importance of the other art subjects. Also, 15.2% of the respondents made a strong statement that the other art subjects must be rebranded and if

possible their names modified to reflect current trends. They were also of the view that government should invest more funds into the promotion of the arts in general. This, they believe will help boost the tourism sector and rig in more foreign exchange for the country. Quite a number of respondents (9%) strongly believe that when parents give the free way to their wards to select their own art subjects based on their interest, this will go a long to curb the menace. Meanwhile, 7.1% of the respondents are of the conviction that the problem will be a thing of the past when teaching of the other art subjects is demystified and made more flexible and student-centered. Additionally, a cross-section of the respondents (6.7%) also believe that the problem can be mitigated when teachers desist from the bad habit of discouraging art students from selecting other art related

subjects.

**Table 7.** Recommendations to solve the preference for Graphic Design.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
ICT should be introduced into the curriculum of all the other art subjects	58	27.6	27.6	27.6
Parents should allow their wards to select their own art subjects based on their interest.	19	9.0	9.0	36.7
The other art subjects must be rebranded, if possible their names modified to reflect current trends.	32	15.2	15.2	51.9
Valid The teaching of the other art subjects must be demystified and made more flexible.	15	7.1	7.1	59.0
Teachers must desist from discouraging students from selecting other art subjects.	14	6.7	6.7	65.7
Art students must be educated by their teachers on the importance of the other art subjects.	40	19.0	19.0	84.8
The government should invest more funds into the promotion of the arts in general.	32	15.2	15.2	100.0
Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data September 2019.

## 4. Conclusions

The main objective of the study was to investigate the reasons behind the high preference of Graphic Design by Visual Art students at the expense of other art related subjects. It is clear from the findings that there are varied reasons for which Tertiary and SHS art students prefer Graphic Design. However, personal interest in Graphic Design was prominent among the reasons stated by respondents. This gives an indication that there is a strong force of attraction that Graphic Design possesses which the other art related subjects do not have. Incidentally, computer relatedness and the attractive nature of Graphic Design were some of the major reasons stated by respondents as a force which endear them to develop love and interest for the subject. Notable among the reasons for the preference of Graphic Design is the incessant pressure art students receive from their parents and guardians to pursue Graphic Design.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that ICT should be introduced into the curriculum of all art related subjects and courses in the Senior High Schools and Tertiary institutions across the country. It is also recommended that art teachers should take it upon themselves to educate their students on the importance of the other art subjects. Also, the other art subjects must be rebranded and if possible their names modified to reflect current trends. In addition, government should invest more funds into the promotion of the arts in general. Teachers must desist from discouraging students from selecting other art subjects. Parents must be advised to give freedom to their wards to select their own art subjects based on their interest. Art students must be educated by their teachers on the importance of the other art subjects. The researchers also believe that when the approach of teaching the other art subjects is demystified and made more flexible and student-centered, more students will develop interest in the less endowed art subjects.

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