

RESEARCH PAPER

GIRLS' MOTIVATION, PARTICIPATION AND PREFERENCE FOR VISUAL ARTS SUBJECTS IN FOUR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN CENTRAL REGION, GHANA

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ABSTRACT:

The study sought to examine girls' motivation for and subject preferences on the Senior High School Visual Arts programme in Ghana. Using findings based on the multi-site case study research method with direct observation and interviews, the study found that 54% of 300 girls in four schools in the Central Region made personal decisions to study Visual Arts while 34% were coerced into the programme by school Heads; only 12% were inspired or persuaded. Textiles emerged the most preferred elective subject because it involves "girl-friendly" skills and offers "female-appropriate" occupations. The 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 clay easily dirties their clothes. Sculpture is the least preferred elective because it demands much energy and effort, involves using sharp tools and working of heavy materials; it is therefore an "inappropriate" subject for girls. This apparent discriminatory attitude towards some Visual Arts subjects impacts negatively on girls' academic achievement on the programme and undermines gender equality in learning, educational and career development. Effective delivery of the Visual Arts curriculum and counselling could encourage more girls to participate fully in the programme.

Keywords: *Gender; attitude; elective; Visual Arts; Senior High School*

INTRODUCTION

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 (Evans-Solomon, 2004; Asihene, 2009). According to the Curriculum Research and Development Division's Teaching Syllabus for Visual Arts (2008), 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 (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 (Owusu-Afriyie, 2009) and by inference, not all the schools are able to offer a wide selection of electives to enable every student satisfy their needs. 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 (Opoku-Asare, 2008), implying that all Visual Arts teachers are competent enough to teach all aspects of GKA very effectively. 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 (Amenuke *et al*, 1999). 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 (Rihani, 2006), 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 (The President’s Education Reform Review Committee, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

This study was based on a stratified sample of 300 girls studying Visual Arts in four Senior High Schools in the Central Region of Ghana. The distribution of study respondents among the four schools was 120 (or 40%) for an all-girls School A; 90 (or 30%) for a co-educational School B; 40 (or 13.5%) for an all-girls School C, and 50 (or 16.5%) for a co-educational School D. School A provided the highest number of respondents mainly because it is a large all-girls school with a high population of Visual Arts students. School B had more

male students than girls; School C had a low student population whereas School D had the lowest intake of girls in Visual Arts. School D was reported to have few highly qualified teachers, relatively poor infrastructure and learning facilities and therefore poorly patronized.

Data was sought mainly through direct observation of classroom activities and 13 lessons taught by different teachers across the four schools (three lessons in Picture-Making, three in Textiles, two in Sculpture, three in Ceramics, and two in Graphic Design); and personal interviews of Visual Arts teachers and Heads of the four schools. Because permission was not sought to disclose the identity of the sampled schools, they are identified in this paper as Schools A, B, C and D.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Motivation for SHS Visual Arts education

Table 1 shows that 162 or 54% of the 300 sampled girls made a personal decision to study Visual Arts while 102 or 34% were compelled by their school Heads into the programme.

Having 162 or 54% of the 300 respondents make personal decisions to study Visual Arts at the Senior High School implies the programme enjoys a positive image among Junior High School (JHS) girls. The 162 girls were also likely to have experienced good teaching of some aspects of Visual Arts within the JHS Pre-Vocational Skills curriculum and therefore had adequate relevant information on this SHS pro-

gramme to give them a fair idea of what the Visual Arts programme entails. This personal decision is a positive sign for women's empowerment, suggesting that when given the chance, many adolescent girls can have the confidence to make decisions and take responsibility for their own lives, their career, and their future. This is in line with Target 4 of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goal 3 aimed at eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education, no later than 2015 (Earthscan, 2005).

As Table 1 also shows, 54 (45%) of the girls in School A made a personal decision to offer Visual Arts while 56 (46.7%) of them were coerced onto the programme. A contrasting picture is seen in School D where only one girl was compelled but 92% made this personal decision for the programme. With the exception of School A which compelled the highest percentage of girls into Visual Arts, the other schools received more decisive and independent-minded girls who are likely to do well on the programme. Evans-Solomon (2004) reports that School A is a prestigious, highly sought-after girls' school which many Ghanaian parents would do anything to have their daughters enrolled in even if it meant placing those girls on programmes they least prefer. The school's popularity is therefore the prime motive for "offloading" students into Visual Arts in particular. Asihene (2009) reports that before the introduction of the Computer School Selection Programme in 2004, Heads of Senior High

Table 1: Motivation for Visual Arts education

Motivation	No. of Respondents by School				Number	Total %
	School A	School B	School C	School D		
Personal decision	54	42	20	46	162	54
Was persuaded or inspired by someone	10	15	8	36	36	12
Was compelled by school	56	33	12	1	102	34
Total number	120	90	40	50	300	100
%	40	30	13.5	16.5	100	100

Schools used “offloading” as a strategic tool to redistribute students across the various programmes of study offered by their schools and to also help them achieve their schools’ admission quotas for each year.

This positive image of 162 girls taking responsibility for their own educational progress, however, contrasts sharply with the case whereby 34% of the total respondents were compelled by their schools to choose the Visual Arts programme. This scenario implies redefining the academic goals of many more girls into areas that may be out of place with their interests and career aspirations. Interestingly, this group of girls had originally opted for either General Arts or Business Studies. They were however, placed on the Visual Arts programme because their Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) grades fell below the acceptable cut-off grade for admission into their preferred programmes, creating the impression that Visual Arts is appropriate only for low-achievers.

Anecdotal information obtained through casual conversations with some teachers in the sampled and other non-case study schools revealed that the large majority of such “offloaded” students end up on the Visual Arts programme. Why this should be so is an issue of further research interest. The “offloaded” girls could have gone to other schools that are least subscribed. As Rihani (2006) explains, students who are not engaged in learning, those who do not see the relevance of what they are learning and those who are not participating actively in class will often be the students to drop out of school. In addition to being a potential cause for some girls dropping out of secondary school, “redirecting” could also lead to passive student learning, absenteeism and learning difficulties mainly due to lack of interest and enthusiasm.

Considering that not all Junior High School students in Ghana have the opportunity to study any Visual Arts subjects (Siaw, 2009), there is

every indication that some of the “coerced” girls may lose out on the benefits of the Visual Arts programme and thereby have their educational and career opportunities thwarted. The flip side of this scenario is the possibility of the “coerced” girls playing truant, misbehaving or even exhibiting disruptive attention-seeking behaviours that may negatively influence the “motivated” girls and thereby causing some disciplinary and learning problems for those who may succumb to such negative tendencies. On the other hand, a positive show of enthusiasm by the “motivated” girls could challenge the “coerced” girls to face reality, accept the challenges posed by the respective Visual Arts subjects and work hard to excel on the programme. The same position holds true for male students in co-ed Schools B and D.

The minority 36 (12%) study respondents (see Table 1) who were persuaded or inspired to opt for the SHS Visual Arts programme suggests poor visibility and impact of professional women artists in Ghana as role models to inspire young adolescent girls into arts education. The low figure also suggests that few teachers, school counsellors, family members and peers of JHS students in Ghana know enough about the Visual Arts programme to provide the right kind of information required to orient applicants into this creative discipline. Knowing that the majority of adolescents are particularly susceptible to the influence of peers (Allen and Antonishak, 2008) makes it plausible to surmise that some of the “persuaded or inspired” girls could be studying Visual Arts just to please others. They could even have been inspired by the myriad television commercials, advertisements and other artifacts seen in the local environment.

The implication is that inadequate publicity and awareness of Ghanaian art and artists hinders the opportunity for young people in Ghana to desire Visual Arts education. It also implies inadequate provision of career guidance and counselling services in the schools to help final-year JHS and first-year SHS students in par-

tical, to make informed educational and life choices. It is crucial that the Ghana Education Service and the Ministry of Education build the capacity of School Counsellors to provide adequate services to positively influence adolescent students to make more informed decisions and choices that will guide them into adulthood. Table 2 depicts the gender and class distribution of Visual Arts students in the sampled schools.

Gender and class distribution of Visual Arts students

Although the Ghanaian educational system provides equal opportunity for adolescent male and female students to access the Visual Arts programme, Table 2 depicts a clear gender disparity in favour of males in the two co-educational schools - 83 in School B and 57 in School D. This data is very significant in terms of the national target of increased girls' enrolment and gender parity in general education by 2015 (Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2003). Perhaps, increasing the number of women teachers in the Visual Arts departments of Senior High Schools could entice more girls into the Visual Arts programme.

To Rihani (2006), the lack of female teachers in a school is a missed opportunity to provide meaningful professional female role models to young women and men on a daily basis. The problem is accentuated by the fact that only five women Visual Arts teachers were found in the four schools - three were in Textiles, one in Picture-Making and one in Graphic Design, seemingly confirming the girls' perception that some Visual Arts subjects are appropriate for boys to study and others for girls. Besides, 98%

of the respondents knew only one lady textiles artist based in Accra while 2% mentioned some women artists resident in Cape Coast who work in textiles. This shows poor visibility of practising women artists within the Ghanaian community of professional artists to serve as role models to inspire more JHS and SHS students into the local arts industry.

A widely held perception by the teachers and students interviewed in the sampled schools is that Visual Arts receives the most "offloaded" students and in some cases athletes, to strengthen the schools' sports teams. This suggests that some of the study respondents' presence on the programme may be a façade; the schools may be thrusting undesired career choices on some of their students, and not helping them to develop their natural gifts and academic inclinations. Such students could feel marginalized, disconnected from the learning activities, and even face ridicule from their peers for non-attendance and non-performance on the programme. Besides, without parental support, interest and belief in the Visual Arts as an academic programme and a lucrative profession, out-of-pocket funding of basic materials and tools needed to fulfill the requirements of the programme could turn some "offloaded" students away or at best, make them passive participants only. It is important therefore that "offloaded" students are given adequate counselling to enable them cope with the challenges of the programme.

Subject distribution of study respondents

Table 3 shows the spread of respondents on the various Visual Arts subjects offered in the four schools. It is evident that students in Schools B

Table 2: Gender and class distribution of Visual Arts students

SCHOOL	SHS1		SHS2		SHS 3		TOTAL		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
A	0	103	0	124	0	64	0	291	291
B	25	15	27	17	31	13	83	45	128
C	0	15	0	12	0	15	0	42	42
D	19	12	18	10	20	15	57	37	94
Total	44	145	45	163	51	107	140	415	555

and D specialize in Ceramics, Graphic Design and Picture-Making while School C's specialization is in Textiles, Graphic Design and Picture Making. The data shows that patronage of Textiles, Picture-Making and Graphic Design is higher than Ceramics, which is offered in Schools A, B and C. Preference for Textiles is strongest in School A in particular with 67 or 55.8% of the 120 respondents offering this subject. The explanation given by the girls for the high patronage of Textiles was that the subject offers more career opportunities and poses fewer challenges to girls who study it. Besides, the art can be practised without much start-up capital and investments. This seems to corroborate Kane's (1990) assertion 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.

Although School A offers four elective subjects in two combinations of Picture-Making with Textiles or Graphic Design with Ceramics, it is seen from Table 3 that Textiles had 67 (55.8%) of the 120 girls as against 20 (16.7%) in Graphic Design. This is likely to result from interest generated by good teaching and effective practical lessons in Textiles. The fact that students in Schools B and D are limited only to the choice of Ceramics with Graphic Design or Picture-Making while their colleagues in School A have four electives to choose from implies that not all Visual Arts students have adequate opportunity to develop their full potentials for an enhanced future in the Visual

Arts industry. Table 3 also shows a relatively fair distribution of respondents in Picture-Making, Graphic Design and Ceramics in Schools B, C and D, with the girls being evenly distributed on the three subjects in School B.

Sadly, none of the four schools offered Sculpture which has the potential to provide additional opportunity in carving, assemblage and construction, and modelling in three-dimensional format to expose the students to a wider range of vocational skills. Undoubtedly, the more electives a school offers, the wider the students' creative options and the better the decision making in selecting the preferred combination of subjects to satisfy individual personal goals. The current limited number of subject options is very restrictive to the students' creative development. Heads of Senior High Schools which offer Visual Arts ought to recruit more specialist teachers for all the subjects to encourage effective student participation in the programme.

Most preferred subjects

Table 4 shows the elective subjects the respondents would choose if they had to go through the process by themselves. The data shows that 136 or 45.3% of the 300 respondents would choose Textiles, with 68 or 22.7% opting for Picture Making if they had the opportunity. Textiles is clearly the most preferred subject of the four electives, perhaps in relation to the widespread use of locally manufactured and imported fabrics in dressmaking, interior decoration, and the fashion industry both in Ghana

Table 3: Subject distribution of respondents in the sampled schools

School	Sculpture	Ceramics	Textiles	Graphic Design	Picture Making	Others
A	0	10	67	20	23	0
B	0	30	30	30	30	0
C	0	0	15	15	15	5
D	0	13	0	14	13	0
Total	0	53	82	70	81	5

and across West Africa. This also seems to reflect the historical engagement of women in the marketing and distribution of wax and fancy textile prints in Ghana. The scenario can also be linked to the availability of a ready market for locally screen printed, batik and tie-dyed fabrics, as well as indigenous printed, stamped and dyed ceremonial fabrics; Textiles therefore seem an “appropriate” subject for girls.

The decision to study Picture-Making (a compulsory subject) by the 40 respondents in School A if they had to choose subjects again could be attributed to good teaching that motivates the girls to want more of drawing although many of the respondents believed that only girls who are gifted in drawing opt for Picture-Making. This is atypical because many of the girls interviewed said they were scared of drawing the human figure and therefore shun this subject. Their teachers confirmed that drawing simply scares many girls into inactivity while others refuse promptings and encouragement to draw any part of the human body.

Basis for elective subject preferences

The following sections explain the various factors that the respondents consider when choosing elective subjects.

Picture Making: It demands good drawing skills which many girls do not have but its teaching is interesting and stimulating; those who have good drawing skills enjoy the drawing lessons and excel in the exercises assigned them. The teachers often show them inspiring artworks and encourage them to work hard. Many of them did Picture-Making in JHS and find pleasure in the subject and desire to pursue careers in the field.

Ceramics: The teachers teach well and make their lessons interesting. Clay, the main material for Ceramics, is soft, malleable, easy to use and can be recycled after drying. Clay is also readily available for executing the assigned practical exercises. Although processing clay is tedious and its products are fragile in the unfired state, anyone who has patience, dexterity and the right temperament can work with the material. The teachers offer much encouragement and inspire students to work hard. The only challenge is that wet clay can stain clothes.

Textiles: It involves skills in sewing, crocheting, dyeing, printing and designing which come easily to girls. These lead to occupations that can be practised virtually anywhere with minimal investment. The topics and related practical

Table 4: Most preferred electives

Elective Subject	School A	School B	School C	School D	Total	
					No.	%
Sculpture	0	0	0	2	2	0.7
Ceramics	15	223	10	0	25	8.3
Textiles	40	197	18	25	136	45.3
Graphic Design	20	134	7	5	47	15.7
Picture-Making	40	202	13	5	68	22.7
GKA & Others	12	24	2	5	22	7.3
Total	120	90	50	40	300	100.0

activities tie in perfectly with the knowledge and skills demanded by the fashion industry that most girls in Visual Arts desire entry. The making of clothing and fashion accessories is a very lucrative job that is enticing and because girls have delicate hands, they are able to manipulate fabric easily and transform it into garments and other creative articles. Girls have the patience to work the details required in Textiles.

Graphic Design: Girls with good or average drawing skills can work in Graphic Design since posters, advertising and packaging design do not require outstanding levels of drawing. It combines well with Textiles for work in the fashion industry. The subject also provides opportunity to get into television and films and also demands what comes naturally to girls – finesse, care for details, patience, among others.

Sculpture: Sculpture involves lifting and carving heavy materials and therefore considered inappropriate for girls. It demands exerting much energy; it is tedious, time-consuming and involves working with heavy and sharp tools, which girls are afraid of. Girls do not have the level of energy Sculpture demands and is deemed appropriate for boys because they are strong.

It is obvious that different factors underlie the respondents' preference for and participation in particular Visual Arts subjects. Preference for one subject over another, however, seems to depend on skill, talent, inspiration, the quality of teaching offered by the teachers, previous learning experiences on the JHS Pre-Vocational Skills programme, target career choices, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and attractions to design elements in the environment. Invariably, views of what is appropriate for boys and girls to learn can undermine equality in learning and deny more girls of secondary education, which is a key intervention for increasing the inclusion of women in decision-making in public life, and empowering them within the home and the workplace (Rihani, 2006). It is important

therefore that girls pursuing Visual Arts education are provided information that demystifies the nature of the various subjects and their associated career opportunities to enable them participate fully in the programme and stretch their creative endowments.

Least preferred subject

Surprisingly, Table 4 shows that only 22 (7.3%) out of the 300 girls would study GKA if they had to choose their subjects all over again. The fact that GKA is a compulsory subject for all Visual Arts students makes it clear that a large majority of the girls do not like this integrated subject. As the students interviewed revealed, GKA has no specialist teachers and its teaching varies according to the strengths of the teachers who teach this core subject. The girls cited the example of drawing and colour work being very effectively handled by teachers with specializations in Graphic Design and Picture-Making, implying that the GKA teachers emphasize topics in their fields of expertise but gloss over those they have inadequate knowledge of.

Another major obstacle that explains the limited preference for GKA lies with the single textbook that guides the teaching and learning of this composite subject. The "General Knowledge in Art for Secondary Schools" textbook has not been revised since its first publication in 1991 and as the girls intimated, much of the information this book offers lack depth for current use, highlighting the need for an urgent revision of this textbook to include up-to-date information on Ghanaian art and artists in different fields of specialization. The new book could even be compressed into CDs and online material to promote teaching, learning and knowledge sharing via computer technology on a wider scale.

Another issue the girls complained about was that many GKA teachers do not provide them with adequate supplementary information to compensate for the inadequacies of this single Visual Arts textbook. Besides this challenge to

effective learning in the schools, the girls pointed out the non-use of instructional support materials to complement the basic chalk diagrams their teachers make on the chalkboard and the verbal examples that their teachers mainly used during teaching sessions, which they said, make GKA lessons difficult to understand and assimilate what is taught in class.

Without the requisite logistics for effective art teaching, fieldtrips to Bonwire, Dabaa, Kpandu and Sirigu for example, could be a vital means for Visual Arts teachers and students to derive out-of-the-classroom experiences to enrich the curriculum and expose them to firsthand knowledge of the production processes in indigenous pottery, textiles, painting, and other allied art forms. Unfortunately, Owusu-Afriyie (2009) laments the reluctance of some school Heads to release budgeted funds to finance the requisite logistic support for educational trips. Inadequate funding therefore limits aesthetic experiences that could complement the scanty literature provided in the GKA textbook for enhanced teaching and learning. This is because only the SHS 2 and SHS 3 classes in School A had been sponsored to visit KNUST to interact with students and lecturers in the Faculty of Art. The School A respondents reported how the trips expanded and shaped their perceptions of the diverse Visual Arts disciplines, citing in particular, the strong impressions that the female students they saw sculpting in KNUST had made on them and motivated them to wish for tertiary art education.

One interesting issue that evolved from a discussion of the benefits of fieldtrips to successful learning devoid of theoretical teaching is the fact that the School A girls who had been part of the KNUST trips knew that the world-acclaimed Ghanaian painters, Ablade Glover and Ato Delaquis, and ceramicists Kofi Broni and Kwame Amoah, who are mentioned in the GKA textbook, were living and practising their professions in Ghana. Lack of logistic support is thus a compelling factor in Visual Arts teachers resorting to compiling their own "notes"

which they dictate to their students during lessons (Owusu-Afriyie, 2009). This leads to many Visual Arts students being denied access to aesthetic experiences to be derived from community resources. The idea is that regular fieldtrips could provide a novel means of making GKA in particular and the Visual Arts curriculum in general, more relevant to student needs.

It is not surprising therefore that a large majority of the respondents (that is 278 or 92.7%) of the 300 respondents had "voted" against this compulsory subject (see Table 4). Besides, the girls reported that many GKA teachers skip the practical aspects of the subjects apparently for lack of demonstration materials, and treat such topics as class assignment, which they also do not supervise to ensure that the students do the work by themselves. This behaviour could lead to the students having other people do their final year examination projects because they had not learned to do this in school. The respondents are therefore signalling their teachers to seek alternative means to help them learn what has been designed for them. The implication is that teacher inefficiency, poor teaching, inadequate support by school Heads, and uninspiring lessons undermine student learning and academic achievement in GKA in particular and the Visual Arts programme in general.

Attitude of respondents in observed lessons

Picture-Making: The girls had difficulty drawing human figures but showed more interest in representational drawing. Many of them struggled with the figure exercises and complained the exercise was too difficult. Many of the girls lacked confidence in the figure drawing tasks. In collage and mosaic, they had no difficulty using sharp knives and scissors to cut up tiny pieces of paper, fabric and other materials they required as well as gluing, pasting and using odds and ends to create pictures. They worked quietly and patiently and completed the assignments with ease. Many of them were reluctant to scrape off work they had done wrongly in mosaic when their teachers asked them to, ob-

viously unhappy to “spoil” a good piece of art work.

Textiles: In the tie-and-dye, batik, embroidery and screen printing lessons, the girls found the tying, dyeing and unfolding of the dyed fabrics easy and showed much enthusiasm in the assigned activities. Their excitement showed in the designing and preparing of the fabric and discussion of dresses they would sew from the tie-dye and batik fabrics in particular. The girls did the thread and needle embroidery exercises very gracefully, meticulously, confidently and easily got all the assigned stitches right while the boys struggled through the activities. They were, however, slow in the screen printing exercise and had much difficulty nailing the wood to create the frame and also stretching the fabric taut on it. They complained the exercise was energy sapping, time consuming and difficult to attain the precision required for the right-angled corners of the frame and the commensurate tension in the mesh they used. Most of them were reluctant to put in much effort to prepare the screen for printing and sought help from the boys.

Graphic design: In the packaging and book binding lessons, the girls handled the scissors, cutting knives and pliers with great care because they did not want to injure themselves. They were not willing to exert energy to press down the tools to get the assignment done properly and were not confident in handling the tools they used. It was obvious the girls were unwilling to work on energy sapping tasks.

Ceramics: In the ceramic sculpture, throwing, and firing lessons, the girls were very careful in handling clay and because they did not want to make their uniforms dirty, they did the pounding and wedging of the washed clay very gingerly. They were not confident in mounting and throwing on the potter’s wheel for fear of falling off it and so could not produce good works. In the firing lesson, the girls clearly became discouraged when some of their artifacts got shattered, cracked or warped because

they had not wedged the clay well, and so had trapped air bubbles. Because very few of the girls had aprons on, many of them worked slowly and tried hard to prevent the clay from soiling their clothes, which made it difficult for them to complete their assigned tasks on time.

Sculpture: Observation in a different co-ed school revealed involvement of very few girls in this elective subject. In the modeling and carving lessons, the girls worked slowly but very carefully while using sharp carving tools and concentrated on what they did without talking. They sought assistance from the boys during the carving session and clearly lacked confidence in the tasks assigned them. Modelling in clay was done comfortably but very carefully to avoid getting clay on their clothes.

CONCLUSION

Although only 300 girls in four schools constituted the population studied, the study points to girls’ education in the Visual Arts being hampered by differential levels of artistic exposure at the Junior High School level, inadequate information on the nature and demands of the SHS Visual Arts programme, limited number and combination of elective subjects offered by the schools, and ineffective teaching that does not motivate students to excel on the programme. The perception that girls have neither good drawing skills for Picture-Making nor the level of energy required for Sculpture militates against creative development. Textiles is the most preferred subject because it offers “female-oriented” vocations and requires little start-up capital for entrepreneurship. GKA is least preferred because of ineffective teaching. Preference for and participation in Visual Arts subjects seem to depend on skill, talent, inspiration, the quality of teaching offered by the teachers, previous learning experience, target career choices, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and attractions to design elements in the environment. Nonetheless, building the capacity of Basic School teachers to effectively teach Creative Arts, and Basic Design-and-Technology, would enable more students to

benefit fully from the SHS Visual Arts programme.

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