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## The Value of Graphic Design in the Senior High School Visual Art Programme in the Ghanaian Educational System

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### **Abstract:**

*This study examines the looming danger facing Graphic Design which is a component of Visual Arts subjects in Ghana's education as it is underrated as compared to other subjects offered in Senior High Schools. It examines evidence of the capabilities that art education, especially Graphic Design, develops in students and what it prepares them for. The study was purely descriptive, and observation and unstructured interviews were the main instruments adopted to gather information from headmasters of selected Senior High Schools, parents, teachers, and students offering Graphic Design as a course. The study revealed that the Visual Arts, in general, are not given the needed recognition and attention as is given to other subjects such as Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM), etc., by the stakeholders of education in Ghana. The study emphasized the importance of Graphic Design and made it clear that Graphic Design increases the students' thinking capacity to the extent that it makes them able to apply their thinking power in solving problems even in other academic areas and in life outside the school. The study's outcome will diffuse people's negative perceptions of graphic design and outline compelling reasons to champion its development in Senior High Schools in Ghana.*

**Keywords:** Graphic design, graphics, visual arts, art education, senior high school, creativity

### **1. Introduction**

The Second Cycle or Senior High School plays a pivotal role in students' education for the country's future development. At this level on the education ladder, the visual arts students derive a firm foundation in the various disciplines in the art to enable them to progress into the tertiary institutions to be prepared fully for the world of work.

In line with the objectives of the Senior High School Visual Arts program in Ghana, students, who pursue Visual Arts as a course, offer General Knowledge in Art (GKA) as a mandatory subject in addition to two other elective subjects, which are to be studied in three years. The two elective subjects have to be chosen from Textiles, Graphic Design, and Picture Making in the two-dimensional art disciplines and Ceramics, Basketry, Leatherwork, and Sculpture in the three-dimensional disciplines.

According to the Senior High School Visual Arts Syllabus (1991), the Visual Arts courses have been selected to help students acquire competence and skills in the art for individual and national development. This means that the Senior High School Visual Arts program is mainly intended to offer students basic employable skills that will enable them to become useful members of society when they leave school. For this reason, the scope of the Visual Arts programs has been expanded to include education in information technology. This is because the advent of computers and their application in education makes it imperative for Visual Arts students, in general, to acquire knowledge in computers to make them competitive in the job market where knowledge in digital imaging is a pre-requisite.

The syllabus of the Senior High School (S.H.S.) on the Visual Arts program in Ghana provides information on what should be taught within each discipline. It also offers specific guidelines on what, why, how, and when a subject is to be taught to satisfy the general aims and objectives of Secondary Education in Ghana.

According to the syllabus, the inclusion of vocational subjects in the Senior High School curriculum seeks to expose students to various skills. This will help learners who complete this level of formal education would be able to produce marketable products to earn a living even if they are unable to pursue further education. The programs are also designed to equip the Senior High School Visual Arts graduates with basic skills in Basketry, Ceramics, Graphic Design, Textiles, Leatherworks, Picture making, and Sculpture to enable them to set up small-scale ventures for employment. The essence here is that, depending on the resources available in the communities in which a school is located, a student offering two or three elective subjects in Visual Arts will be exposed to a wide range of vocational opportunities. Such opportunities will help him or her acquire visual thinking and manipulative skills in these disciplines. They are also to experience art to eventually develop their cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains.

Graphic design in art education, therefore, offers a broad spectrum of areas that could enable students to enhance their talents, develop skills and contribute through the production of objects of art that would be mass-produced. These would boost the Creative Arts and Tourism industries to further contribute immensely to the economy and national

development. However, despite the benefit that could be derived from Graphic Design, it is not given the recognition it deserves making those who choose to do it in school look inferior.

Ismaila & Eshun (2018) lament that irrespective of the fact that visual art and, for that matter, graphic design has been expanded to cover all levels of Ghana's education, many Ghanaians hold some reservations about it. In one breath, they appreciate and enjoy its use. In another breath, despise it as a vocation, career, or anti-Christianity. This attitude towards Graphic Design and art, in general, has transcended beyond the controlled level. The decision to incorporate Visual Art into the curriculum of Ghanaian schools was worthwhile, and the rationale for teaching graphics goes further to include the production of high-caliber professionals who will contribute to the development of the country in a wide variety of fields. Unfortunately, the Senior Secondary School Visual Arts have not been given the needed attention as is given Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Students who choose to do graphics are looked down upon. Because people believe that the arts are simply crafts that do not require any education as compared to other subjects purported to lead to the acquisition of government employment (office work/white collar job) which are even non-existent. In an interview, Adutwum (2021), the current Education Minister, bemoaned reasons why the Visual Arts students are most sidelined in schools and called for equal opportunities for Visual Arts students to pursue any course of their choice, even at the University. Adutwum laments, "When you go to a school, you'll see people pointing fingers at the Visual Arts students. We claim someone who does Visual Arts cannot be an engineer because the person is not given an opportunity at the University."

Over the years, Governments and officialdom pay lip service to the development of visual arts. It appears that anything to do with the visual arts is considered by the powers that be as less important and can wait forever. No wonder there are inadequate financial allocations to the schools for facilities, provision of art materials, and inadequate professional art teachers teaching at the basic levels. These and many other negative factors result from the decrease in the number of visual art students who pass out of Senior High School.

Any decline in the number of Graphic Design students who pass out of the Senior High Schools harms the number of such students that could be admitted to the tertiary education level, including the universities making the future of the programs bleak and unpredictable. If this looming danger is not tackled head-on, the implication will be very disastrous. In light of this, this study focuses on bringing to the fore the current state and strengths of Graphic Design at the Senior High School level and proffers suggestions for its proper recognition in the education of Ghanaian students at the Senior High School level.

The conceptual framework for this study hinges on the complementary approaches of the arts (visual and performing) identified by the California Department of Education (1989), which are expressed in four (4) components of arts in education, namely:

- Aesthetic perception,
- Creative expression,
- Arts heritage and
- Aesthetic valuing.

The inclusion of each of the components in all art instructions allows students to become aesthetically responsive, literate, and creative citizens with a life-long interest and involvement in the arts.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Definition of Art

According to The National Art Education Association (2016), "Art is a rendering of the world and one's experience within it." That world and one's experience are tapped, probed, and penetrated through the process of making art forms. The search for the experience is both inward and outward. This is supported by Debra, Larmann, & Shields (2015), who assert, "We live in and respond to a world of images, and so have artists, whether in ancient Egypt, sixteenth-century Italy, or twenty-first-century America." The art, therefore, becomes the reflection of the visual culture in which it was created and not just the creative achievement of the one who makes it.

Siegesmund (1998) defines art best when he says, "It is a realm of feeling, sensory concepts, and exquisitely varied forms of human representation that give us insight into what it means to be in, what the relation is, and what has to be comprehended and also to know the world."

Siegesmund concludes by stating, "Studying visual culture naturally fits into this definition of art because it helps students gain a deeper understanding of our world." In the light of Siegesmund's definition, incorporating art education in the Ghanaian schools' curriculum is a step in the right direction as arts education increases student engagement.

The Liberty Classical Academy (2021) consents to this and asserts that the arts are hands-on, have immediate rewards, focus on positive achievements, develop concrete products, and foster collaboration. The arts offer many opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills through authentic performance. The arts boost the confidence level of the learners and assist them in thinking positively about themselves and what they learn. Art education assists in making learning matter to students by giving them a medium to connect new knowledge to personal experiences and express what they have learned to others.

Tyler & Likova (2012) declare that art is a "communicative system that conveys ideas and concepts explaining why it is possible for the same brain structures that support other cognitive roles like human language to be used in the arts such as music or drawing." Tyler & Likova emphasizes that art is a multidisciplinary communicative system that offers an ideal platform to learn about the pleasure of knowing and eventually provides the inspiration to explore further, ask questions, analyze and synthesize, and engage in critical thinking. Concurring with the statement by Tyler and Likova,

Debra, Larmann, & Shields (2015) describe Art as "a form of language; one that can communicate with us even more powerfully than written language. Art communicates so directly with our senses of sight, touch, smell, and sound that it helps us to understand our own experiences. By learning to see, we experience new sensations and ideas that expand our horizons beyond our daily lives."

## 2.2. Visual Arts

The Visual Arts, according to the Encyclopedia of Art Education (2021), "is a modern but imprecise umbrella term for a broad category of art which includes several artistic disciplines from various sub-categories." On its part, the Study portals (2021) maintain that the visual arts aim at creating pieces of work that mainly employ the use of the visual environment to convey messages of emotion, ideas, or information. It goes further to state that the visual arts are grouped under three main sub-fields, namely:

- Fine art which consists of painting, drawing, graphics, sculpture, and architecture;
- Decorative art which is made up of tapestry, ceramics, mosaic art, glass art, and jewellery art, and
- Contemporary art which comprises artistic photography, art print, video art, animation, and graffiti art

In addition, Unbound Visual Art (2021) describes the visual arts as art forms that create primarily visual works, such as ceramics, drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, design, crafts, photography, video and film making, and architecture. The visual arts also include applied arts like industrial design, graphic design, fashion design, interior design, and decorative art.

According to Britannica (2021), the visual arts meet the eye and evoke emotion through an expression of skill and imagination. These include even the most ancient forms of art, such as painting and drawing, sculpture, printmaking, photography, and installation art which emerged as a result of the development of technology.

Visual Arts include a wide collection of media, tools, and processes. Most people misconstrue the visual arts as only drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, and photography, even though many other areas fall entirely or partially within the visual arts. Design areas such as architecture and the built environment, fiber and clothing, folk arts, as well as crafts, and video animation form part of the visual arts. Visual art can, therefore, be defined as "a creative art whose products are meant to be appreciated by sight."

Brako-Hiapa and Sebbeh (2019) emphasize that visual art is a branch of the arts that can be perceived by our sense of touch. The implication of this is that the visual arts focus on the creation of primarily visual works. It embraces all forms enjoyed or appreciated by seeing or touching. These authors claim, "We speak of visual arts when we are considering the entire process of creation." Visual arts are the process of creative activities in which the product is the result or record of the experience.

Visual art indeed is life in itself, as the Roth Society (2022) maintains, "The way we perceive the world and how we appreciate it is an art, and we live with it every day. Art is an outlet of our inner self that serves as a bridge that brings together gaps in our society; it is a bridge between man and nature, between countries, and continents." This is anchored on the fact that the world would have been a very dull place without art. Taking the basic needs of the human being into consideration, the artists design and produce packages for food to be transported from the point of production to people at other places and make it convenient for the usage and storage of excess food. The places for shelter ranging from huts to impressive mansions, and the flashy cars that give comfort and mobility are artistic. There are textiles, clothing, fashion out uniforms, apparel, garments, suits, and many others to cover the nakedness of mankind and protect themselves from unfavorable weather conditions. Besides, if the world were without art, movies, music, paintings, photography, drawings, designs, etc., it would have been a very dull place to live, and our emotions would have been indescribable and unpredictable.

## 2.3. Graphic Design

Bertoline, Wiebe, Muller, and Nasman (1995:9) claim that graphics is a "Visual communication language incorporating text, image, and numeric information. Graphics include everything from the more traditional types of engineering drawings to sophisticated computer models, such as the solid mechanical part or the display in the goggles of a virtual reality system, and all follow the rules or laws of visual science."

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Art (1988), the term "Graphic Art" (graphic design) has several meanings. However, in the context of the fine arts, it most usually refers to those arts that rely essentially on line or tone rather than color. From this definition, graphic art involves drawing and engraving since the most essential elements needed are lines. The Oxford Dictionary of Art further explains the term as being used to cover the entire commercial printing field, including text and illustration.

On its part, the (World Book Encyclopaedia, 1985) describes graphic art as a general term for drawing and other techniques used to reproduce words and pictures. This technique includes block printing, engraving, etching, lithography, and silk screen printing. It further describes graphics as being used commercially to advertise and prepare newspapers, magazines, and illustrations, as well as pamphlets, art production, bookbinding, fashion design, and lithography.

From the definitions so far, it can be deduced that Graphic design is a process of working with lettering, lines, illustration, or images to make representations for understandable visual communication. It can also be said to include the production of postage stamps, trademarks, billboards and television commercials (advertisements), designing brochures, packages, posters, and printing books and magazines. In addition, etching, engraving, block printing, and other forms of printing such as silkscreen printing are all works of graphics.

Graphic design is one of the most important aspects of our lives. "We see it everywhere, from the ads we see on TV to the posters we see in the subway. Graphic design is used to communicate messages, sell products, and create an overall image for a company or organization" (Graphic Elements, 2022).

#### *2.4. Visual Arts Education*

Visual arts are the study of ceramics, printmaking, sketching, crafting, painting, textile design, drawing, Digital Painting, photography, sculptures, filmmaking, videography, architecture, artworks, short movies, and documentaries. To learn visual arts, an individual requires long periods of regular practice so they can put their imagination, creative mind, and creativity adequately to work (Gomes, 2019).

Visual arts education involves instructions in the art that is seen. There are many different types of visual arts, including those that have existed for millennia and some of which have just become prevalent in the last decade.

Indeed, the impact of a particular discipline is not dependent on how long it has been. However, like every aspect of human endeavor, the subject of art, by its nature, is subject to growth and evolution. There are divergent views on what visual art education is all about. While some consider it a vital part of the school process, others see it as a detraction from science and mathematics. The truth is, visual arts in high school, middle school, and elementary school classes are vital to children's academic development (Abington Friends School, 2020).

Students participating in the visual arts develop a structure for responding to and symbolizing the experiences. Such encounters lead to the formation of enduring attitudes, values, and satisfaction. Students will not only develop values and attitudes but will also derive pleasure from their accomplishments as they gain flexibility and confidence from having direct experience with the visual arts. Visual arts, as part of the curriculum, assist students in learning to see aesthetically as the creative experience they gain from producing artworks, as a study of the heritage of art, and as a critical study of art forms. As a part of basic learning, the visual arts provide opportunities for self-discovery and creative expression for all students (California Department of Education, 1989).

The National Art Education Association (2016) claims that professional educators have found out that teaching students to be creative is just as deliberate a process as teaching students to be literate or to solve mathematical problems; it takes more than simply handing out materials. Experienced teachers, therefore, break down the creative process to help students identify problems, gather the necessary information, find possible solutions, and validate those that are effective.

In addition, Gomes (2019), various forms of Visual Arts help to bring out human emotions and skills. The visual arts are widely appreciated through painting and visual skills necessary for the workforce's refinement. When the visual arts are implemented in school education, the arts help the students to bring out their creative abilities and also develop their entire personalities. The students, whose efforts turn out to be positive, end up gaining self-confidence. The arts also help them in fundamental thinking and improve their psychological and creative aptitudes.

The discussions so far point out that Visual arts education is basic to the development of a full literate. For this reason, educators must strive to ensure that students get to the level of visual aesthetic literacy to give them an understanding of the communicative nature of the visual arts, which provides them with expressive and intellectual skills. Students who pursue and master the symbolic structure of Visual Arts will be well-positioned to speak to that part of themselves and others. That part is not dependent on the coding and decoding of verbal language, which is very prevalent in a society where more information is transmitted visually and verbally.

### **3. Methodology**

The study was purely descriptive, and the main instrument for data collection was observation. The descriptive approach took place in natural and real-life settings. The essence of using the descriptive research technique was to obtain data in a naturalistic observation and further understand the issues in a real-life context. Headmasters of selected Senior High Schools, parents, teachers and students offering visual arts as a course were observed through unstructured interviews to solicit information. Their behaviors were described, analyzed, and conclusions were drawn for the study. Data for the study was collected in the school setting where the students, their teachers, and the headmasters served as the accessible population. The purposive sampling techniques were adopted in selecting the schools for the investigation. This allowed for information to be sought from only the Senior High Schools that offer Visual Arts.

### **4. Results and Findings**

#### *4.1. Importance of Graphic Design Education*

Graphic design is relevant and demands specialization in the modern job market. Graphic designers, or communication designers, create visual messages via graphics, images, and text. These elements accurately create advertisements, banners, logos, user interfaces, and many more. There are plenty of sub-specializations in the career field of a graphic designer as well. However, before diving into all the nuances, you need to learn the basics (Inkbot Design, 2021).

To become professional graphic designers, the graphics students are trained to acquire a sense of style and creativity, excellent communication skills, knowledge of coping with computer graphics and animation, and develop familiarity with design software, etc.

Graphic design students are taught to be creative and learn how to solve old issues with the help of new ways. This helps the learners to possess the possibility to rethink their preconceptions. In the process of thinking about one problem, the learners think from more viewpoints to arrive at a possible solution. This varies from the normal classroom,

where learners must provide just one correct answer. Therefore, learners are taught to be sure in their responses. In this situation, they learn to see the dignity in every approach they make.

Graphic Design Education prepares the learners to acquire the skill that enables them to become professionals who can be hired to:

- Create graphic design websites, which are very essential in today's world,
- Work with clients manipulating color and typography, among others,
- Help people advertise their works and products

Design education also prepares learners to become Freelance design professionals, ambitious artists, Web developers, illustrators, designers, and advertising specialists.

The Graphic Elements (2022) declares, "By conveying information clearly and concisely, graphic design helps students learn new concepts, and when used correctly, graphic design can be fun and engaging, which can help students learn more effectively."

Additionally, graphic design can be used to help students understand difficult concepts that might be difficult to explain in words alone. After all, they say, "a picture is worth a thousand words."

The Graphic Elements continues by saying, "In the real world, you are constantly faced with problems that need to be solved. Whether you're designing a new product or coming up with a marketing campaign, you need to be able to identify the problem and come up with an effective solution. Graphic design can help students learn how to identify and solve problems in a creative and effective way."

#### 4.2. Importance of Art Education

Education, by all standards, is supposed to be the key to our development and the society in which we live. If this goal is not achieved, this means education has failed. Therefore, individuals who are getting education for their personal development are offered the opportunity to be trained in the specific subject areas that will equip them with the requisite skills needed to achieve their personal goals to enable them to contribute positively to national development. For people to be educated is to:

- Either be trained informally through apprenticeship by learning their parents' and their neighbors' professions in carpentry, masonry, plumbing, fishing, etc.
- Or in the formal set-up where learners go through structured learning processes that follow a curriculum and a timetable and eventually acquire a certificate upon successfully completing the course studied.

In the formal education system, and for that matter, the Senior High School, the learners can choose for their studies various courses and subjects that can serve as the foundation for their future careers.

The subjects are categorized into:

- General Arts,
- Business,
- General Science,
- General Agriculture,
- Home Economics, and
- Visual Arts

Therefore, the focal point of this discussion is on the Visual Arts education at the Senior High School level in Ghana and its importance to the learner and the society.

Delacruz (2009) emphasizes that art educators believe that art education can make a difference in an increasingly complex, interconnected world. These art classrooms serve as means through which the learner or student can associate well with their culture and the experiences of other people.

According to the Liberty Classical Academy (2021), arts education develops creativity, one of the top five skills employers prize for the 21st century. It goes on to say that students who get arts as part of their education perform better on assessments of creativity than students who receive little or no arts education. For example, performing arts students show greater thinking diversity than their peers. Classes, where students create original artwork with color that portrays creative use of space, developing their rhythms, or writing and producing their plays, become an exciting experience to reckon with. These classes offer an enabling environment that fosters creativity, which is an important skill to obtain in a rapidly changing world.

The arts increase the thinking capacity of the students such that they can apply their thinking power in solving problems in other academic areas and in life outside the school. Through the arts, the learners develop the ability to observe, interpret, see things from different perspectives, analyze, and synthesize them. Art students are well-positioned to employ critical thinking to arrive at a better decision in situations that call for learners to decipher information to determine the facts that are relevant and trustworthy about a particular issue. As students learn to read notes, compose works of art, create a painting, sculpt and model objects in ceramics, create imagery in graphics, etc., they learn how to develop new concepts, build vocabulary and understand new language and trends that drive the modern world.

The Study portals (2012) again asserts, "Students of visual arts usually have the chance to learn about visual expression culture, post-modernism, animation, art history, film, graphic design, photography, print media, etc." In addition, the student will gain general competencies to explore the artistic message expressed in the visual language and conduct functional or aesthetic creations with different materials and basic techniques. They will also gain knowledge of design techniques, master the use of color and eventually understand the theories of composition.

Works of art provide a visual context for learning about historical periods. Music, painting, drama, and dance help literature come alive. Graphic designs and drawings, such as those made by inventors and engineers, complement the learning of scientific and technological principles and innovations. This stems from the fact that all types of graphics come under the general heading of Visual Science, which comprises the study of the visual and technical application of graphics and categorizes the visual sciences into two major areas: visualization and geometry. Visualization refers to the "process of mentally understanding visual information". While geometry is described as a "branch of mathematics, that deals with the properties, relationships, and measurements of points, lines, angles, planes, and solids". The ability to visualize and have knowledge of geometry combines to create artistic and technical drawings. Applications that are considered visual science include:

- Visual designs,
- Printing technologies,
- Communications media,
- Engineering,
- Technical graphics, and
- artistic drawings

Graphics play a significant role in all areas of engineering, including documentation, communications, design, analysis, and modeling. Each of the activities is so slanted towards graphic communications that engineering, for example, is 92% graphical-based (Bertoline, Wiebe, & Muller, 1995).

The Liberty Classical Academy (2021) points out that the arts teach young people about beauty, proportion, and grace. Students of art can peruse conflict, power, emotion, and life itself as the power of the arts can give us joy, help us understand tragedy, promote empathy and make theories real. Art-making, especially graphic design, empowers the students to experience what it feels like to be active members of a community and urges them to work as a team to determine and achieve common goals. In the process of developing art products, group performance, or any type of collaborative artistic endeavor, students practice the fine art of teamwork. In working together, the students learn to appreciate differences and diversity and accept that teamwork leads to greater achievement. Students also get to know that by living and working together, the arts contribute to making the school environment safer and more peaceful for learning and can express their intentions and aspirations freely, and are ready to accept constructive criticism from others.

Graphic Design, like other Arts, increases capacity for leadership in the sense that students who participate in the arts develop leadership skills, including decision-making, strategy building, planning, and reflection. They manage to use the skills acquired effectively and develop a higher sense of identity and confidence in their ability to affect the world around them in meaningful ways (Liberty Classical Academy, 2021). In addition to developing students' intellectual capabilities, visual arts education also helps develop young people's sense of civic engagement. The arts stimulate or release imagination by bringing into existence an alternative "reality," noted Maxine Greene (2007). In so doing, young people can realize a different world other than what they already know. In this regard, art education offers possibilities for creating new worlds instead of just accepting the world because it is known that imagination reaches toward a future, what might be, what should be, and what is not yet there.

#### *4.3. Benefits of Graphic Design Education*

Various forms of visual arts, such as Graphic Design, help to bring out human emotions and skills. The visual arts are widely appreciated through graphic design, painting, and visual skills that are necessary to refine the workforce. When visual art is implemented in school education, the arts help students bring out their creative ability and develop their entire personalities (Gomes, 2019). Gomes outlines five main advantages that could be derived from performing visual arts in school, which include:

- The exploration of imaginative power and the boost of self-confidence, Provision of help in school tasks,
- Improving coordination skills, learning from real artists,
- paying attention and responsibility,
- Learning decision-making skills

Graphic Design assists students in representing their thoughts and skills and discovering original knowledge and artistic skills creatively while performing. It, therefore, serves as a method used to represent one's feelings and creative mind in the way of life.

Practical activities in making graphic design also influence students' intellectually as their learning abilities improve with the practice of artworks. They are much improved in creating aptitudes as they learn quicker than individuals whose works do not involve dynamism as in the visual arts.

Students who engage in graphic designing regularly can figure out different ways of manipulating devices, tools, materials, and methods in selecting various brushes and pencils for shading, printmaking, photography, picture-making, graphic designing, etc. As they do this, they can improve their coordination skills. Students, in visual arts and, for that matter, graphics, learn to be focused, have patience and pay attention to whatever artwork they engage themselves in. Students sometimes tend to lose concentration with some disturbances. However, with the help of visual arts, they learn how to organize and plan a skill that helps them focus on particular tasks without being distracted. Students, who study the arts, often perform better in other academic areas. This projects directly from the skills they develop as young artists. Compared to students who have not received such instruction, they are able to adapt skills learned in one subject and apply them to another (Abington Friends School, 2020).

In the graphic design process, students tend to associate themselves and their work with astute artists and reference the works of such acclaimed artists, whether local or international. This makes the students expand their knowledge by critically analyzing the techniques, styles, and skills of these artists who serve as their mentors and subsequently improve on their arts to elevate themselves to higher standards. With the help of graphic design, students learn to decide, determine, and analyze situations. They also learn how to analyze and develop logical thinking skills. These help them decide on various alternatives while making better choices for their work.

Creativity is regarded as crucial in the scheme of work in the school and for the success of future career. Despite what is done in the industry, opportunities abound for problem-solving, and being able to think outside the box becomes a critical point. Creativity allows us to produce innovative solutions, and visual arts are a prime way to nurture creativity and help students develop marketable skills. Furthermore, creating something enables students to develop a high sense of satisfaction that is difficult to replicate. Students whose efforts turn out to be positive, gain greater self-confidence and become very eager to try new things. This confidence is not limited to art, but with a solid sense of self-worth, students are better equipped to tackle other subjects with zeal. According to the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission (2004), "Students apply what they learn in the visual arts across subject areas and develop competencies and creative skills in problem-solving, communication, and management of time and resources that contribute to lifelong learning and career skills and also learn about careers in and related to the visual arts."

The acquisition of knowledge in graphic design plays a vital role in understanding one's histories, cultures, and politics of the society as well as areas such as science and engineering, just as Bertoline & Wiebe (1995) declared above in this study. Graphic Art is so deeply embedded in every culture that neglecting art instruction is detrimental to children's growth as global citizens, in the form of students, get knowledge in graphics and acquire a well-rounded education. It serves as:

- A source of aesthetic experience, a source of human understanding,
- A means of developing creative and flexible forms of thinking, and
- A means of helping students understand and appreciate the world around them.

Debra, Larmann, & Shields (2015) posit, "Art is a form of visual language, and much as we use vocabulary and grammar to communicate verbally, artists use visual vocabulary (the elements of art) and rules similar to grammar (the principles of art)." In the study of an artwork, we use the same process called visual analysis involving the elements and principles to analyze the work: In this process, students learn about the elements and principles and are shown how to apply them in the visual analysis. In addition, visual arts instruction also helps students learn to value divergent views and cultures, which are becoming increasingly important in the global society.

Ghana's Minister of Education Adutwum (2021) explains the importance of art education in a nutshell as he declared, "The students who study Visual Arts are my favorite. They are the most creative people in the country. Someone who can look at your face and draw it, look at a bridge or car and draw; we say they are not brilliant because they fail to grasp things easily." This and many, as inferred from the various authors above, should be enough ground and a wake-up call for people, especially parents, to dispel their negative perception of the visual arts.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Responsibilities, Performance, and Attitudes of Graphic Design Teachers in the School Setup

To accomplish the goals of art education and, for that matter, Graphic Design and Visual arts, teacher education programs from the colleges of education to the universities have designed the curriculum for the benefit of:

- Those Pursuing multi-subjects, especially in art education and
- Those planning to teach single-subject courses in the visual and performing arts as specialized courses

The curriculum is structured to provide foundations in the arts that address the visual and performing arts content. This means that future teachers of the visual arts have the opportunity to major or specialize in a specific art discipline at the college or university level and develop their artistic skills and knowledge.

At the basic or lower-level, art education ought to give the teacher the opportunities to:

- Plan and assess art learning systematically,
- Gain an understanding of art pedagogy, including processes and strategies for art instruction appropriate to the ages and abilities of students,
- Develop strategies for working with diverse student populations, and Gain experience in using new media and electronic technology relevant to teaching, learning, or performing the arts. (Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission, 2004)

However, in Ghana, everything that concerns art is considered a talent, and a few people opt to be trained as art teachers even though art forms part of what is termed the "Creative Arts" subjects. In the colleges of education, the study of the Creative Arts comes in two folds. Some offer it as part of their core subjects, and others offer it as an elective subject. Only the teachers who studied the subject as an elective have a detailed understanding of the graphics. For this reason, only a handful of the teachers who teach in the basic schools can articulate themselves well in the teaching of graphic design. As a result, learning graphic design at the basic level is not very encouraging. The arts at this level are referred to as Creative Arts. According to Appiah (2015), the Creative Arts is an integration of Visual and Performing Arts comprising drawing, painting, carving, modeling, weaving, sewing, casting, collage, basketry, etc., for the Visual arts – arts that can be seen. In contrast, the performing arts consist of music, dancing, drama, storytelling, poetry, etc., representing the arts that

are performed and perceived by hearing and seeing. Appiah stresses that the rationale for studying Creative Arts at the basic level is to assist pupils in developing all the domains of knowledge and human and moral values.

At Junior High School (JHS) level, the arts are grouped under Basic Design Technology (BDT), which consists of Home Economics, Pre-Technical Skills (Pre-Tech), Basketry Sewing, Calabash work, Leather, Graphic Design, etc. The teachers are so selective in the teaching of the subjects that their teaching is tilted towards the ability of the teacher to the detriment of the learners. This makes them lose in the other areas that their teachers often ignore. An important setback at this level is that almost every teacher who pursued a further course in the visual arts at the Degree level wants to teach in the Senior High School, making the foundation at the basic level very weak.

Most of the visual art teachers in the second-cycle schools do not make their impact felt at the school and community level. Apart from their normal classroom teaching, they do not practice the art they teach, making them unproductive. This does not encourage the Graphic Design students to rate the course and themselves high when juxtaposed with other subjects. At the school level, the graphic design teacher is not given higher recognition as his job or knowledge of all art teachers is tagged as "drawing". However, art does not involve drawing only but comprises areas that require creativity and critical thinking. Almost all the positions in the schools are held by English, Social Studies, and Science teachers. The graphics teacher is always looked down upon and relegated to the background. Most of them feel too busy in the studios and do not project themselves as capable of holding positions outside their work area.

### *5.2. Attitudes of Graphic Design Students*

Students, who enter Senior High School to do Graphic Design as a course, commence with a preconceived mentality. This is built on an unfounded foundation established long before by some category of people that "visual art students are not intelligent". This puts a lot of psychological pressure on them as they have to struggle to debunk the impression that has already been created. Most of the students develop low self-esteem and see themselves as second fiddle to their counterparts offering other courses that are considered to be prestigious as a result of the negative perception people have about the visual arts. The students cannot put it behind them and do not attach importance to the study of the visual arts. So, in most schools, visual art students are noted for truancy and notoriety.

### *5.3. Parental Influences, Expectations, and Implications*

Most Ghanaian parents expect their children to become highly learned and eventually end a job in reputable government organizations or establishments. Their understanding of education also means the ability to be highly intellectual where their assessment of intelligence, in this sense, is measured by the courses or programs offered in school. Ghanaian parents regard the ability to study and pass English or Mathematics, or Science as the pathway to becoming successful and meeting their expectations. Therefore, they prefer subjects that require 'intelligence', and the students who pursue these courses are considered bright. As such, some of these parents will do whatever they can to coerce their wards into these subjects regardless of the student's interests and abilities which, in effect, could either have a positive or negative impact on their academic performance. Such students could be enrolled to pursue graphic design, technical and vocational subjects, including Visual Arts, in which they could learn and acquire skills needed to find their way in the job market where they may excel. This posture of parents triggered this study to investigate the extent parental influence on subject selection affects graphic design students' academic performance in Senior High Schools in Ghana.

### *5.4. Junior High School Students' Placement into the Senior High Schools*

The placement of Junior High School (JHS) students into the Senior High school system is characterized by external influences other than the student's own choices. Final-year students at the JHS are given the liberty to select schools and subjects from five options. However, in most cases, observations revealed that some of the headmasters and teachers of the schools make the selection for some of the students. The selection of schools is made before the final year examination. However, they base their selection on the students' overall ability without recourse to their interests and the result of the final Basic School Certificate Examination (B.E.C.E.). Sometimes, they (the headmasters), especially those in the rural areas, select schools of specific categories that are low-grade schools thinking that will enable their students to get admission by putting their school's standards into consideration.

On the part of the parents, some of them have preconceived ideas that:

- Their wards should offer particular subjects that will lead to the realization of their desires for the student and
- End up choosing higher standard schools and subjects that their wards have no capacity or capability to pursue

Ultimately, their wards find the subjects difficult to study, leading to poor performance and dropouts. Some of the students are so naive that they do not know what they can do and what subjects are suitable for them to offer in Senior High School and inadvertently select schools and courses that will not benefit them in the future. They choose schools and courses hastily and later regret having made wrongful choices. At times, the students are influenced by their peers who would not want to part company with them and end up selecting schools and subjects beyond their competence and regret as they move on the education journey.

The problem with the study of Graphic Design in Senior Secondary School can partially be attributed to the headmasters of the Senior High Schools. Despite the students' choice of subjects and the computerized placement system, some headmasters re-allocate students to courses/subjects without recourse to the computerized placement. In the process, brilliant students with good grades are often made to offer science-related courses, while those with poor grades are made to do either Visual Arts or Home Economics. Some of these so-called "brilliant students" might even have chosen



Graphic Design, yet they end up in science classrooms. This action of these headmasters goes a long way to affect the development and progress of Graphic Design and the students who offer them. This accentuates the people's perception that the "Visual arts are meant for dull and fewer intelligence students." They (the headmasters), as intellectual as they are and even as educational leaders, seem not to understand the potential of the visual arts. Aidoo (2018) emphasized this attitude of the headmasters by saying that the "Headmasters and education policy planners will do all to promote science and other subjects at the expense of visual arts. Even some headmasters are still not convinced that the visual arts are as important as literacy and numeracy. Little resources meant for visual arts are always diverted to support other subjects". Their actions not only ruin the students' performance but also make the visual arts students worse off and develop low self-esteem.

The headmasters do not regard the Visual Arts and, for that matter, graphic design as important as compared to the other subjects, especially the Sciences. Therefore, they do not provide adequate resources such as good offices and art studios. There is an inadequate supply of tools, materials, and equipment for the graphic design teachers and the teaching and learning of the arts. Indeed, from personal observations, none of the sighted Graphic Design studios can be compared to any science laboratories across the country. The Graphic Design teachers' office is a small, unplanned space and the art studios are in shambles. Aidoo concurred, "Evidence of this trend abounds in many Senior High Schools all over. Budgetary allocations to visual arts are either non-existent or insufficient to cover its routine and developmental needs."

## 6. Conclusion

From the discussion, the study concludes that:

- Graphic design is everywhere. However, many Ghanaians are unaware that it forms a significant component of our social lives and is the means through which we communicate. Graphic design manifests itself in the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the road we pass on, the car we ride on, and the websites people navigate and connect to people across the globe to access information, education, and transact businesses. The delightful atmosphere people enjoy through the display of goods in the stores, markets, and Malls that causes them to do impulse buying is the end product of Graphic Design.
- Graphic Design educational curriculum, by all standards, benefits the learner in the overall improvement of the students and thus enables them to explore their creativeness and academics.
- Education in graphic design is the way to furnish students with a well-established future. However, not every school is equipped to offer visual arts education due to numerous problems, such as the exclusive focus on STEM classes and a deficiency in funding for the Visual arts. However, access to graphic design education is too important to ignore and essential to be pushed for in schools to provide all children with the tools they need to become empathetic and well-rounded individuals.
- For national development, focusing on only Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics without Visual Arts is just 'one side of the coin'. The displacement of students in subject areas they are not interested in as a result of parental influence often leads to a negative impact on the performances of most of the students and ultimately makes them drop out of school and miss their academic achievements.
- Activities of the graphic design teachers, both on-campus and off-campus, are not attractive enough to lure the visual art students into envisioning the future of the courses they opted for.
- Post-service training in art education is unfortunately inadequate. As a result, most Graphic Design teachers rely on the knowledge long acquired in schools, colleges, and universities to disseminate knowledge to their students.
- There is little or no recognition for Graphics and Art teachers. Furthermore, no provision is made for Art teachers to improve their skills.
- The performance of Graphic Design at the Senior High level has a dire consequence on the Universities that offer various art programs as far as the Graphic Design students' intake and the sustenance of Visual Arts related courses are concerned.

## 7. Recommendations

- Visual Arts Teachers' Associations, such as Ghana Art Teachers' Association (GATA), and Art Teachers' Association of Ghana (ATAG), must, from time to time, organize seminars and symposiums for the Graphic Design Teachers in the Senior High Schools to assist them to keep abreast with current pedagogical issues in teaching the arts and also be well-informed about the current trends in the art world.
- The associations and the individual teachers should create avenues and opportunities for upgrading the graphic design teachers.
- Teachers of Visual Arts should let their impact be felt in the schools and communities they are situated.
- This could be done by:
  - Adopting certain public places and occasionally painting murals, decorating them with paintings of prominent personalities such as political figures, chiefs, eminent citizens, etc.,
  - Making and displaying posters and banners on current issues on social, health, religion, morals, and politics,
  - Mounting of sculpture pieces, art vantage points, etc
- They can also present art pieces to leaders and organizations in their catchment communities to create awareness of the importance of visual art in society.
- The impact of the graphic design program should be manifested in the school environment so that teachers, students, parents, and visitors will experience the contribution of graphic design and the people who practice

them. During annual events such as Open Days, Independent Days, Symposiums, Awards Days, etc., both the teachers and their students could either volunteer or bid for contracts for the decoration of the school compound with various forms of graphic design and also produce posters and banners to advertise the school's programs.

- Graphic Design teachers should also organize shows and exhibitions regularly to whip up the students' interest and motivate them and other students.
- Government and departments should devote some budgetary allocation to the promotion of graphic design and employ and maintain full-time "arts officers" in the Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Education Offices to coordinate art activities at local levels.
- Agencies such as the Arts Councils, Art centers, Museums, Tourist Agencies, etc. should incorporate into their social responsibility ways of developing methods of fundraising to support public art schemes and the award of grants, bursaries, residencies, special stipends, and other types of financial support for visual artists just as is done for others in the other subject areas and industries.
- In its bid to improve and raise the standards of graphic design, the government of Ghana should be the chief patron of the arts by buying significant quantities of graphic design works for public display at memorials, parks, or other public spaces such as Ministries, presidency, offices, and airports in most cities. By so doing, people's attention will be drawn to the importance of graphic design in the environment and increase the morale and pride of the visual artists.
- Educational institutions should prepare learners for the outside world. However, they should not limit the learning opportunities. Otherwise, these learners will lose interest in graphic design and get lost in stereotypes.

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