

Instructional Strategies, Institutional Support and Student Achievement in *General Knowledge in Art*: Implications for Visual Arts Education in Ghana

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Abstract

General Knowledge in Art (GKA) is a core subject for Visual Arts students in Ghana's Senior High Schools but an elective for Home Economics students. Unlike Textiles, Ceramics and allied Visual Arts subjects which are taught by specialist teachers, GKA has no specialist teachers: all Visual Arts teacher are deemed competent to effectively deliver the GKA curriculum; hence teaching and student achievement in GKA varies according to the strengths of GKA teachers. This paper describes an investigation of how the teaching methods, instructional strategies and resources employed by GKA teachers in Ghana's Senior High Schools affect student achievement in the subject. Using findings analyzed from qualitative and quantitative data gathered via questionnaire administration to 420 GKA students (Visual Arts = 227 or 54.0%; Home Economics = 193 or 46.0%) in four schools in Ashanti Region; interview with nine GKA teachers, school librarians and storekeepers, as well as observation of 14 lessons, the study revealed a high student-teacher ratio which encourages 'whole class' teaching via the lecture method, and teacher use of verbal examples, textbook illustrations, chalkboard diagrams, and photographs as instructional media. It emerged that lack of art studios, tools and materials, inadequate funding, and weak institutional support discourage the teaching of practical lessons, including fieldtrips to derive aesthetic experiences from community resources. Lack of ICT and internet facilities also discourage research that could supplement teaching notes GKA students learn for assessment. Invariably, many Visual Arts and Home Economics students who offer GKA make poor grades in internal and external examinations and miss out on higher education.

Keywords: Teaching; Student achievement; General Knowledge in Art; Visual Arts; Home Economics; Senior High School; Ghana.

1. Art Education in Ghana

Art Education has been an integral part of Ghana's school curriculum from pre-primary through to pre-tertiary level for many years (Art Education Programmes as Organized in Ghana, 2001). Art is offered as 'Creative Arts' in primary school, 'Basic Design and Technology' in Junior High School, 'Visual Arts' in Senior High School, 'Fundamentals in Visual Art Related Subjects' in Teacher Education, and 'Fine Art', 'Industrial Arts' or 'Applied Arts' in higher education (Boafo-Agyemang, 2010; Asihene, 2009; Agyenim-Boateng, 2011; Afum-Danso, 2012). One reason assigned for the including Art Education in the Ghanaian school curricula was the need to foster creativity in the lives of her citizens to help solve national problems. In the Senior High Schools, Visual Arts and Home Economics constitute the Vocational Skills programme (Siaw, 2009; Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare, 2011).

1.1 Visual Arts in Secondary Education

The Senior High School (SHS) Visual Arts curriculum comprises nine subjects: eight electives and one core subject - General Knowledge in Art (GKA). The Elective subjects consist of Basketry, Jewellery, Ceramics, Graphic Design, Leatherwork, Picture Making, Sculpture, and Textiles. The Curriculum Research and Development Division (of the Ministry of Education) (CRDD, 2013) which designs the curricula for schools in Ghana has categorized the elective subjects into two groups: Group A comprises the two-dimensional (2-D) arts while Group B consists of three-dimensional (3-D) arts. Graphic Design, Picture Making and Textiles constitute the 2-D arts while Basketry, Ceramics, Jewellery, Leatherwork and Sculpture are the 3-Ds (CRDD, 2008). The syllabus indicates that the subjects are intended to equip students with a variety of vocational skills in preparation for different careers. The syllabus therefore requires all Visual Arts students to complement the study of any two of the eight elective subjects with General Knowledge in Art, which is classified as a core or mandatory subject for all students on the Visual Arts programme. The study of these subjects over the three-year duration of Senior High School education leads to the West African Secondary School Certificate of Examinations (WASSCE) which qualifies graduates for higher education or the job market (Asihene, 2009;

Owusu-Afriyie, 2009).

1.2 General Knowledge in Art

The 2008 Teaching Syllabus describes General Knowledge in Art (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 (Agbenatoe, 2011). The Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD, 2010) also describes GKA as a subject made up of Art History, Appreciation and General Art concepts that provides broad based knowledge and skills in the theory and practice of Art. Like the elective subjects, GKA comprises both theory and practical topics. The syllabus explains that the theoretical part of the GKA syllabus is meant to widen the students' scope of art vocabulary and equip them with the requisite communication skills that would enable them talk knowledgeably about art. The practical component serves to reinforce what is learned in the individual elective subject areas through planned repetition (CRDD, 2008) with emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes in Visual Arts for individual and national development (Siaw, 2009).

Empirical research in Ghana reveals that the teaching and learning of General Knowledge in Art is beset with peculiar challenges: it is a compulsory subject for Visual Arts students but elective for non-Art students particularly those in Home Economics; it has no specialist teachers so its teaching varies according to the strengths of the teachers who teach it; curriculum delivery of GKA is guided by a single official textbook; not all aspects of the subject is taught efficiently by every teacher (Evans-Solomon, 2004; Opoku-Asare, 2008; Owusu-Afriyie, 2009; Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare, 2011; Osei-Mensah, 2012). The teaching of GKA depends on the knowledge, resourcefulness, and ingenuity of teachers in the various schools. Ineffective teaching of GKA was the reason cited for 278 (or 92.7%) out of 300 Visual Arts students sampled in four schools in Central Region 'voting' against GKA, citing it as the least preferred of the Visual Arts subjects, implying that if the students had the choice, GKA would be the first subject they would drop (Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare, 2011).

Knowing that students have different learning styles or ways of assimilating information, a one size fits all whole class teaching is not likely to meet with success (Giles et al, 2003); it is important that teachers understand the different levels of intelligences and identify the intelligence strengths of their students so that they can reinforce their specific intelligences when teaching new materials (Armstrong, 2009). This knowledge platform will enable them to meet the students' learning needs and engage them for higher achievement (Gardner, 1999).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative-quantitative research approach with interview, questionnaire administration and classroom observation to gather data from a purposive sample of four Senior High Schools where General Knowledge in Art (GKA) is offered by Visual Arts (VA) and Home Economics (HE) students in one district of Ashanti Region, Ghana. Purposive sampling (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) was adopted to obtain a fair representation of student respondents from the two categories of the Vocational Skills programme. Only Year 3 (SHS 3) and Year 4 (SHS 4) students formed the sample because they had been in the schools and studied GKA long enough to provide in-depth information on GKA and the school environment than the Year 1 (SHS 1) and Year 2 (SHS 2) students. For reasons of anonymity and in line with much qualitative inquiry, the sampled schools are only identified in this article as Schools A, B, C and D. Although the target population for the study was 1,486 (see Table 1), only 429 respondents comprising 420 students, seven GKA teachers, one Storekeeper and one Librarian were accessible for data collection.

2.1 Data Collection

Data gathered via informal interviews from the students, GKA teachers, storekeepers and librarians in the four schools focused on resources available for teaching and learning of GKA, past students' WASSCE records, alternative working areas where schools lacked art studios, and space allocated for students' practical works. Data were also gathered via direct observation of classroom teaching and learning processes in the complete observer role (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) in order to collect valid data on teacher-student interactions during instructional hours for both theory and practical lessons, without participating in any of the activities the teachers engaged their students in. In all, 10 GKA lessons were observed and recorded in addition to four lessons in Sculpture, Graphic Design, Food and Nutrition, and Chemistry purposely to gain insight into normal teacher professional practice in the schools.

Additional data were gathered through questionnaire administration to 470 SHS 3 and SHS 4 students in the Visual Arts and Home Economics departments. The retrieval rate was 84%; 227 students (or 54.0%) from Visual Arts and 193 (or 46.0%) from Home Economics respectively. The school distribution of 420 students who answered the questionnaire was: School A = 93 (22.1%), School B = 210 (50%), School C = 78 (18.6%), and School D = 39 (9.3%). By gender, the respondents comprised 39% males and 61% females.

Combining the various methods to gather data from different sources made triangulation possible (Mulhall,

2003; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010); it also enabled accurate description of the observed teaching strategies and instructional media used by the teachers of General Knowledge in Art (GKA) in the respective schools as well as the activities the teachers implemented to engage the students during instructional hours.

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3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Population of GKA Teachers and Students

As seen from Table 1, the target population comprised 1,469 students who offer General Knowledge in Art in the four schools: 837 in Visual Arts (VA) and 632 in Home Economics (HE); and the nine teachers of GKA. This gives a Student-Teacher Ratio (STR) of 163:1, which far exceeds the official STR of 25:1 for Senior High Schools in Ghana (Sekyere, 2013). This high ratio (STR) suggests overcrowding in all four schools and the likelihood for teaching not being as effective as it would be in schools where the student population did not exceed the recommended ratio of 25:1. Large class sizes could overwhelm inexperienced teachers if they have no leadership support or training in the teaching large classes.

As the data in Table 1 also indicate, student enrolment had increased for three consecutive years in the GKA departments in the four schools. The fourth year students were 259, the third years were 343, and the second years were 461. At the close of the first term, the number of first year students had risen to 406 although admission of fresh students had not yet closed. Since admission was still in progress at the time of the study, it is expected that the enrolment for the first years would be higher than 406. Interestingly, the school observation revealed that this increase in enrolment was not accompanied by the necessary infrastructural development such as provision of standard art studio and other facilities in the Visual Arts departments of the schools; none of the schools recruited additional Visual Arts teachers to increase the existing numbers and thereby reduce the high STR and the teaching load of teachers on the job.

As also evident in Table 1, School B had the largest student population (572) and the same number of GKA teachers as School D which had less than half of the School B population. Whereas School A had the second highest number of students and two teachers, School C had both the lowest numbers of students and teachers of the four schools. Except for the Home Economics (HE) classes in Schools C and D, class sizes at the various levels exceeded the STR of 25:1 specified for Senior High Schools. An overall STR of 163:1 across the four schools for GKA, which every Visual Arts student must pass to validate their electives to qualify for admission into tertiary education is unacceptable by any standards and needs to be reduced to promote teaching and learning effectiveness towards raising academic standards in these schools. Large students numbers and overcrowded classrooms probably accounts for the predominant use of “whole class, chalk-and-talk” teaching observed in both theory and practical lessons across the schools. As Morrow (2007) posits, overcrowding does not allow time for teachers to effectively manage individual attention and make use of participatory teaching and assessment methods.

It was obvious the GKA teachers found it difficult to monitor student behaviour and maintain high learner attention rate, which offers opportunity for teachers to spend more time teaching the entire class rather than giving individual attention. In this situation, fewer students can perform and slow paced students may be left behind and suffer (Morrow, 2007). With large classes, teachers are not able to reach all students or adopt group methods to promote active student participation in learning activities and enable the students gain a deeper and longer-lasting understanding of the topics as well as the motivation for students to learn independently (Child, 2004). Reduced student numbers could improve ventilation in the classrooms and make it more comfortable for the teachers adopt participatory teaching strategies to promote successful learning for the students. In spite of the large numbers, little peer tutoring was observed occurring among the students. The large class sizes, formal teacher-facing-students seating orientation of dual desks and classroom organisation, and budgetary allocation constraints limiting acquisition of expendables for the practical aspects of General Knowledge in Art are very significant factors that impact adversely on teaching and learning outcomes.

3.2 Teaching Methods verses students’ Learning Styles

Strategies and methods of teaching have a great influence on students who come to school with their unique set of characteristics that may assist or impede academic performance have been identified (Gray et al., 2005). As Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences and learning styles also indicates, each student has a unique way of learning material in different situations and that many learning problems occur because there is a mismatch of learning styles between those offering instruction and those receiving it (Gardner, 1999; 2006). Consequently, no single teaching style accomplishes all students’ needs as individuals have preferences in how they receive, process, assimilate, store, and use the information that is presented (Downes, 2010). On how best the sampled students learn, 89% of the 420 students cited involvement in practical activities, listening to lectures and

participating in discussions but as Fig. 1 also shows, 11% of them had no idea how best they assimilate information.

This 11% of GKA students would probably do well in the subject if their teachers had adequate knowledge of multiple intelligences and learning styles to enable them to incorporate significant facets of best practices of effective teaching of relevant topics outlined in the syllabus into the planning and implementation of lessons in GKA; similarly, the large majority (89%) would also go beyond their current standard if they were well informed of the essentials of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and were able to apply their best learning styles to what is taught them. The premise is based on the assertion that once a person's learning style is ascertained, accommodations can be made to increase academic achievement and creativity, as well as improve attitudes toward learning (Giles *et al.*, 2003). Surprisingly, 39% of the students had become used to being taught and learning via the traditional telling mode of communication that may not include adoption of learning support materials to aid comprehension.

Gray *et al.* (2005) believe that students come to school with unique sets of characteristics that may assist or impede academic performance, implying that teaching strategy and methods of teaching can have a great influence on students' academic performance. With respect to how teaching strategy influences learning style, Fig. 2 identifies the lecture method as the most frequently used teaching strategy by teachers in the sampled schools. With 283 (or 67.4%) of the 420 respondents choosing this option suggests that the lecture method has induced more than half the sampled student population to become auditory learners. However, as Dale's Cone of Experience (Anderson, n.d.) explains, people remember only 20% of what is heard, implying that a greater portion of information delivered by the lecture method of teaching will not be remembered by the students after those lessons have ended. This means the lecture method alone does not satisfy all the educational needs of GKA students in the schools; this strategy needs to be modified because Gardner (1999) makes it clear that teachers can improve on education by teaching to address the Multiple Intelligences of students. Inferring from Gardner's theory, students who are not auditory learners may be put off by long lectures and may therefore not benefit from the lessons taught in class.

The Teaching syllabus provides a summary of topics to be covered for each term and it recommends that five periods of 40 minutes' instructional periods per week should be used for the teaching and acquisition of practical skills while two periods per week should be allocated to Art History, Appreciation and General Concept in Art (CRDD, 2008; 2010; Osei-Mensah, 2012). Relating the syllabus requirements to the students' responses makes it clear that it is unhealthy for the GKA teachers to use the lecture method as the dominant mode of teaching such a composite subject.

Educational field trips

Field trip is one of the recommended educational exercises that help to strengthen the understanding of concepts presented in the classroom setting (CRDD, 2010). Even though the schools lack the requisite logistics for effective art teaching, the questionnaire responses revealed that only 19% of the 420 students in the four schools had ever gone on an educational field trip while the majority 81% had never been taken anywhere outside their schools. As Hurwitz and Day (2001) suggest, field trips to art galleries, museums, artists' studios, industrial establishments and tertiary art education institutions, are especially beneficial because students are able to experience an original work of art of a high quality that could serve as a form of reference to help them understand what the slides or prints they see in school actually represent. Interestingly, the study district is endowed with a rich cultural heritage of indigenous *Kente* weaving in nearby Bonwire and Adanwomase, the world heritage *Yaa Asantewaa* Museum at Ejisu, several chiefs' palaces and markets where students could be taken to enjoy unusual out-of-the-classroom aesthetic experiences to enrich the GKA curriculum besides being exposed to firsthand knowledge of the production processes and technologies applied in creating the art so they would learn directly from master craftsmen who engage in the various art forms. 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.

Interaction with students in all four schools indicated an overwhelming desire for field trips and their readiness to pay for such trips if they had to. Interviews with the teachers confirmed that organising educational trips is tedious because they have large numbers of students to manage. One teacher remarked "I'll never engage in such an exercise again because of the difficult time I had dealing with the headmaster and the students on a previous trip". This indicates that the students are eager to participate in field trips but their teachers are not ready to take up the challenge to expand the scope of aesthetic experiences to complement information provided from the GKA textbook and other publications for enhanced learning.

Although Visual Arts students pay school fees that should guarantee enhanced teaching by whatever methods and means teachers would find appropriate, empirical studies show that some school Heads are reluctant to release budgeted funds to finance the logistic support required for educational fieldtrips trips (Evans-Solomon, 2004; Owusu-Afriyie, 2009; Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare, 2011). Reluctance to support Visual Arts

activities with budgeted funds denies Visual Arts students access to relevant aesthetic experiences from community resources (Owusu-Afriyie, 2009). The study revealed that each of the schools had a bus that could transport GKA teachers and their students on field trips. Unlike the Science departments that are able to use this service frequently, the Visual Arts departments were denied their use and hence could not even visit the Faculty of Art at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, about 20km from the study district, to enable them experience teaching and learning of Sculpture, Textiles and other contemporary art disciplines in practice. This explains why only 19% of the 420 study respondents had ever been on a field trip although such trips would expand and shape the students' perceptions of the various Visual Arts disciplines and motivate them to excel on the programme and also desire tertiary art education.

Art Exhibitions

An Art exhibition is a public display of artefacts to show and market skills, discoveries or inventions. Exhibitions could be individual, group, class, school, community; district, regional or international (CRDD, 2010). As Fig. 3 shows, art exhibitions are not organised in the schools; 53.6% of the 420 respondents had never had an art exhibition organised in their schools even though they had spent three or four years in school. This is not good enough because the students are missing out on a chapter of the GKA syllabus, which is devoted to art exhibitions. This implies that school heads as instructional leaders of the schools (Owusu-Afriyie, 2009) have the responsibility to ensure that the financial, logistic and other budgetary resources are provided and also actively monitor teacher efficiency and teaching effectiveness. The fact that not much is being done in terms of practical lessons in General Knowledge in Art perhaps explains why students in the sampled schools are denied participation in exhibitions, which could offer opportunities for appraising the quality of art works produced and for acquiring the rudiments of arts appreciation and criticism as the GKA syllabus requires.

Practical activities

One of the general aims of the GKA curriculum is to help students develop the ability to harmonise opposing ideas, contradictions and inconsistencies to design and produce art works. In accordance with this aim, the teaching syllabus stipulates that five instructional periods per week be allocated to the teaching of the practical components of the subject (CRDD, 2010). However, Fig. 4 indicates that the teachers do not adhere to the time allocation for practical activities specified in the GKA syllabus.

As Fig. 4 also shows, 3.7% of the respondents had not been assigned practical exercises for the term while 39% were given practical work only once in a term. The statistics presented in Fig. 4 attest to the fact that not all SHS Visual Arts students are being assigned the practical work required for effective learning of all aspects of GKA. Interactions with the teachers revealed that student numbers are so huge that assigning them many practical works means assigning oneself the burden of excessive grading. Besides, the teachers confirmed that the students often complain of lack of funds to purchase the materials needed for practical works. In one school, the teachers reported levying the students and using the monies to purchase the required items every term. In this case only students who pay are given the items they need for practical assignments for the term. The teachers found this a very strategic means of satisfying curriculum requirements rather than teaching theoretical lessons as some of their colleagues do in other schools. The solution could be adoption of group study so that the teachers could supervise the students for effective learning (Child, 2004).

As Mzokwana (2008) says, adopting mixed-ability grouping provides opportunity for students to learn from one another by sharing views and discussing topics of common interest. This way, fast learning students can help the slow pace learners in each group while promoting active student participation in the learning activity, development of deeper and longer-lasting understanding of what is taught, and the motivation for learning independently (Child, 2004). When it was suggested that the teachers adopt group strategies with two- or three-member groups as an alternative to whole class teaching that was the predominant teaching method observed in the schools, the general comment the teachers made was that it takes too much effort to sort their students into small groups for lessons.

The Home Economics students who were interviewed confirmed during the observation period that because Visual Arts students normally do practical exercises in their two elective subject areas, the GKA teachers do not often assign the integrated class any practical works as the teachers are expected to do as part of their normal teaching duties. This attitude, the students said, negatively affects the performance of students in the Home Economics department who opt for GKA as their elective subject and depend solely on GKA lessons for skills development, unlike their peers in Visual Arts who get ample opportunity to hone their skills through lessons in the elective Picture-making, Textiles, Ceramics, Graphic design and Sculpture. The implication is that the GKA teachers treat their students as if they all belong to the Visual Arts department and also assume that the elective subjects would provide opportunity for GKA students to engage in practical art activities to fulfil the curriculum objectives for this subject.

By inference, Home Economics students have little or no opportunity to learn and practise the creative skills that

GKA lessons are expected to provide to its learners. This professional lapse suggests laxity in the monitoring and supervision of teaching and learning processes by the Heads of Visual Arts departments in the sampled schools. These Home Economics students in particular are not likely to do well in class written tests and assignments, quizzes, end-of-term examinations in GKA and the external WASSCE assessment. It is imperative therefore that the teachers of GKA address this lapse because the practical component is critical to achievement of the objectives outlined in the GKA syllabus (CRDD, 2008).

3.3 Resources for Learning GKA

Attractive facilities such as laboratories, libraries, instructional materials and art studios are a major contributing factor to high academic performance (Adedeji & Owoeye, 2002). Unfortunately, the questionnaire responses confirmed that 62% of the 420 student respondents do not always have access to the relevant tools, equipment, facilities and materials required for executing assigned practical exercises. The items the students mentioned include brushes, shading pencils and lettering pens; materials such as poster colours, drawing paper, skin and leather; equipment and facilities such as sewing machines, exhibition halls, working studios and kilns for firing clay ware. This suggests that GKA students in the sampled schools are not being exposed to knowledge of conventional tools and materials needed for contemporary art production. The school libraries were also poorly stocked with art books that the students could learn from; they had no computers and internet connectivity to source literature to supplement the learning materials they receive from their teachers. Dependency of students on their teachers for knowledge, the students intimated, makes it necessary for them to memorize the content of handouts and 'teaching notes' the teachers often dictate for them to learn. This does not empower the students to take responsibility for their academic success.

3.4 Students' Interest and Performance

On what makes GKA an interesting subject to the students, Table 2 shows that 48% of the 420 respondents identified personal reading and practice, and the way their teachers teach (35% of the respondents) as the most important factors that create interest in this subject. Teachers serve as a motivating factor in student learning (Traylor, 2010) so teachers in the sampled schools have the responsibility to make GKA appealing to their students so that they would desire to learn what is taught them and also excel in it.

3.5 Students' rating of own Performance

Concerning the students' assessment of their performance in GKA, Fig. 5 shows that 63.1% of 420 respondents said their performance is "good" and 8.7% of the responses rated their own performance as "poor". This suggests that there is more room for improvement for many students since excellence is the ultimate goal. To improve on the students' performance, the teaching and learning approach to GKA should be modified.

4.0 Nature of Observed Lessons

Observation of GKA lessons in the sampled schools unearthed the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching of GKA. This personal observation focused on the teachers, students and the teaching and learning processes in 10 GKA and other lessons in the four sampled schools studied. Some of the topics of the observed lessons were Still Life Composition, Elements of Design, Prehistoric Art, Egyptian Art, Decorative Leather Techniques, the Rationale for the Visual Arts Programme, Art Appreciation and Criticism. The following sections describe the details discernible from the lessons observed across the four schools.

4.1 Teachers' knowledge of Subject Matter

In the 10 observed lessons, eight of the nine teachers exhibited proficient mastery over the subject matter. The relevant aspects of the lessons were covered as expected. In three of the lessons, the teachers did not end the lessons within the stipulated instructional hours; they extended into the subsequent periods. Questions posed by the students were directly responded to and the answers given were commendable. No teacher was unable to respond to the students' questions. The teachers' mastery of the subject could be attributed to their higher degree qualifications and the wealth of experience they had gathered while teaching the same subject over the years. The questionnaire responses indicated that the least experienced teachers had been teaching for three years since graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Art Education, which is the minimum qualification required for teaching in senior High Schools in Ghana (Asihene, 2009; Siaw, 2009).

4.2 Teaching Strategies

Only one of the 10 observed lessons was taught with practical activities. This lesson was on Still Life Drawing based on a composition of earthenware bowl, a kitchen stool, a water flask, and paint container that were placed in front of the class. The teacher made a brief presentation on still life and then guided the students to draw those items. The remaining 90% of the lessons took the form of lectures in which the teachers used verbal explanations, verbal illustrations and made few references to real objects when they cited examples during teaching. Two of the lessons observed were follow-ups to previous lessons.

4.3 Teaching Resources / Instructional media used

In one lesson, the teacher used a photo album containing art works on decorative leather techniques. The teacher only verbally explained how the techniques were used to execute the works as he opened the album page by page

as shown in Plate 1a. The students were enthused and became very curious. Other objects observed during the lessons an earthenware bowl, a kitchen stool, a water flask, and paint container that were arranged for still life drawing (see Plate 2b).

The main teaching techniques used in the observed lessons were verbal illustrations, verbal descriptions, teacher-made chalkboard diagrams and illustrations from books. Verbal illustrations dominated all the lessons observed. This technique was used to cite examples, list items verbally and to describe scenes. The teachers also illustrated ideas by drawing images, symbols and charts on the chalkboard. On a few occasions, the teachers used illustrations in textbooks to explain ideas they tried to communicate to the students. The pictures and drawings in the GKA textbook were helpful to the students.

4.4 Teachers' Notes

A lesson plan is a concise, working document which outlines the teaching and learning that will be conducted within a single lesson. It provides a practical and a usable guide to the teaching and learning activities that will occur within a particular lesson (Butt, 2008). Lesson plans are documents written by teachers to help them structure the learning for themselves and for the students (Kizlik, 2010) and serve as a map for the teacher to navigate and sail effectively throughout the period of the lesson (Tamakloe et al, 2005). No lesson plans (referred to in Ghana as 'lesson notes') were seen being used by the teachers who taught the observed lessons in the four schools, a reflection of what Opoku-Asare (2004) observed among primary teachers in some Kumasi schools. It was also realised that the teachers carried textbooks, printed handouts and reference books that contained information they considered adequate for the purpose to the classrooms and mostly dictated portions of such texts for their students to copy as "notes" to be learned for examinations.

Informal conversation with some of the teachers revealed that the school authorities do not strictly monitor or demand written lesson notes from their teachers although this is standard professional practice for teachers in Ghana (Opoku-Asare, 2004; Boafo-Agyemang, 2010; Osei-Sarfo, 2013). Anecdotal records show that efficiency in preparation of lesson notes is a façade for effectiveness in teaching. Rather, the Assistant Headmasters and Heads of Department whose responsibility is to ensure standard practice with respect to effective educational outcomes emphasise presentation of the Schemes of Work or the Weekly Forecasts which they inspect each term. This creates the impression that lesson planning is not strictly required of the teachers because they probably are all very experienced teacher who can teach effectively without them. Though experienced teachers can reduce lesson plans to mental maps (Kizlik, 2009), and a well prepared lesson can also be taught without a lesson plan (Farrant, 1996 as cited in Boafo-Agyemang, 2010), it behoves on the teachers to write lesson notes to remind them of what they intend to teach during the allotted instructional periods for GKA. This suggests a gap between professional requirements and teaching in practice.

4.5 Presentation of Lessons

Introduction: In three of the 10 lessons observed across the four schools, new topics were introduced in seven lessons but three were continuation of previous lessons. The teachers started such lessons by recalling facts deduced from the previous lessons. In nine (90%) of the 10 lessons, the teachers wrote the topics on the chalkboard as part of the introduction. The only exception was a single lesson in which the introduction was done verbally and not written on the chalkboard.

Development of Lessons: In five (50%) of the lessons observed, the teachers developed the lessons with very little involvement of the students. However, questions were asked of the students to alert them in the course of teaching. In one of the lessons, the students observed were engaged in practical work but in four other lessons, the students virtually used the whole instructional period of 80 minutes writing down 'notes' that were dictated to them by the teachers.

Questioning Skills: The question and answer method of teaching is one of the most effective ways of stimulating students to higher levels of thinking and to develop effective communication between teachers and students (Orlich, 2004). Good questions can rhetorical, overhead, direct, relay or reverse to maintain students' interest; and should require convergent as well as divergent thinking on the part of the students who provide the answers (Child, 2004). Instead, all the questions the teachers asked the students to answer during teaching sessions, during the evaluation stages and while assessing the students' learning after the lessons, and including examinations, were at the level of Knowledge in Bloom's Taxonomy order of questions (Santrock, 2004). The questions were characterised by verbs such as what, define, find, identify, list, name, write, state and mention. This did not require higher level thinking of the students.

4.6 Class Management

Class Control: In eight (80%) of the 10 lessons observed, the teachers established good rapport with their students and had effective class control for the lessons. They also issued the right rewards and punishments as required. In one particular lesson, the teacher whipped the students who were not present during the previous lesson severely with a rattan cane. Some minutes into the lesson, however, a good bond was re-established and the lesson went on devoid of intimidation. This gave the indication that the students were very familiar with the use of the cane as punishment and a means to get the students to be punctual in class. There was another lesson

in which the students were literally under much pressure which showed as tension among the students. The teacher was seen using stern facial expressions to warn the students who were disturbing the class. Informal conversations with some students revealed that the students feared that particular teacher, a woman, who was noted for being strict with her classes and would not countenance misbehaviour among the students. Although this teacher was not questioned why she treated the students that way, it is assumed that she adopts that stance as any mother would, only to ensure that the students paid attention in class and she got the best out of them.

4.7 Seating Arrangement in the Classrooms: The students in two of the schools were found seated on mono-desks for lessons while two others use dual desks. Both types of desks seemed suitable during normal instruction and class exercises that demand writing but the desks were very inappropriate for drawing, painting and other exercises in GKA. This furniture had a rough surface and a very short width than was required for the kind of exercises done in the art classroom. The students generally were squeezed into the desk and obviously felt uncomfortable during practical exercises. Plate 2 shows that the drawing paper used by the student seen in the illustration is broader than the top of the classroom desk.

The traditional seating arrangement of desks arranged in straight rows and columns equally spaced with students facing the writing board (McCroskey and McVetta, 1978 as cited in Opoku-Amankwa, 2010) dominated classrooms in the sampled schools. The same model of dual desks which minimizes easy movement of teachers and students was seen in all the classrooms visited. The students sat in rows even during a Still Life lesson where the seating arrangement should have been circular to allow the students to sit around the composition and draw the objects from their various angles of view.

4.8 Teacher-Student Relationship: With the exception of two lessons, the other eight lessons were devoid of tension. The relationship between the teachers and the students was cordial and conversational. In 60% of the lessons observed, the teachers brought canes to punish misbehaviour in the classroom but not all the teachers used the canes in class. It was realised that none of the students were scared of the canes; to them, it was a normal school practice.

4.9 Students' Involvement in Lessons: The students' involvement in the observed lessons was realised through the asking of questions when the teachers gave them the chance. When there was the need for clarification, the students asked questions freely. In all the 10 lessons observed, no group activity was recorded. Fairly, students were attentive during instructional hours. There were a few instances where some students were seen looking outside the classroom as if they were bored with the lessons. Some of the students were flipping through the pages of books that were before them. In a few cases, the teachers used non-verbal means such as clapping of hands to draw those students' attention to the lessons.

4.10 Evaluation of Lessons

There were only two lessons in which the teachers gave class exercises to the students but they were not marked immediately. A GKA teacher was seen marking students' works during one break period but these were found to be previous exercises. In all the lessons observed, almost all the teachers had to teach another class immediately they finished with one, so most of the lessons were concluded in a hurry.

The observation exercise revealed some challenges in relation to the quality of teaching and learning of GKA. The major feature identified was that the lessons were taught theoretically. Activities that should equip the students with practical skills were not included in the lessons. As a result, the students went through the programme without acquiring all the required practical skills. The number of practical works given to the students to work on was not enough. Besides, the teachers did not supervise the few ones they gave to the students.

The lessons were found to be more teacher-centred while students acted as their audience only although there are diverse activities that the teachers could have introduced in the lessons to ensure students' active participation. This teaching strategy benefits only the students who are auditory learners, leaving out students who may prefer other learning styles to aural learning. The fact is all these students must be satisfied as well. Generally, it was noted that the teachers did not make any deliberate attempt to prepare teaching and learning materials for their lessons.

The findings from the questionnaire and the observation in the sampled schools suggest the need for interventions that would make the teaching and learning of GKA more effective. These interventions would have to revolve around lesson-planning and interactive teaching based on the theory of multiple intelligences to address the problem of abstract 'whole-class' teaching of GKA that only addresses the needs of auditory learners and develops the verbal-linguistic intelligence of the students.

5. Conclusion

The problem of high Student-Teacher Ratio in the sampled schools and overcrowded classrooms apparently contributes to the teachers' inability to adopt interactive instructional strategies other than the "chalk and talk" lecture method which dominated curriculum delivery in the sampled schools. The lecture method of teaching

helps only the auditory learners and develops Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence in learners (Gardner, 1999). Lack of working studios also made it easy for the teachers to avoid working outside the classrooms, which also did not motivate them to teach the practical components of the GKA curriculum. Although a good lesson plan does not ensure students will learn what is intended, it contributes to effective teaching and learning (Kizlik, 2009). Lesson 'notes' preparation is standard classroom teaching practice in Ghana (Agyeman-Boafo, 2010) so the Heads of Visual Arts departments and the school heads ought to make monitoring of it a priority in order for the teachers to design appropriate lessons and implement them to achieve quality teaching and learning outcomes as specified in the General Knowledge in Art syllabus. It can be inferred from the study that the GKA teachers are not sensitive to learning difficulties and testing mechanisms that use the natural inclinations and intelligences of students to help them recognize their academic strengths and weaknesses and thereby be guided to work and learn in their areas of strengths right from Year One.

Theoretical teaching through lectures that ignore the relevant practical activities is likely to shut off the spirit of active learning through exploration and experimentation among GKA students and thereby prevent them from engaging in critical thinking and development of high creative skills. Besides being guided by a single official textbook and several handouts derived from different sources, the teaching and learning of GKA did not include application of computer software such as Adobe Photoshop and CorelDraw that the students could use to enhance information obtained from the classroom. The schools' computer laboratories were not easily accessible to Visual Arts students for class lessons or for research purposes although they also pay for the use of ICT facilities. This scenario would not instill in GKA students the spirit of research so that they could retrieve relevant literature to augment the 'teaching notes' their teachers dictate to them during GKA classes. Inaccessibility to ICT and relevant educational resources can limit the students' capacity to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills that would help them to pass the West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) well and gain access to higher education in the polytechnics and universities.

Addressing teacher inefficiency, poor teaching, inadequate logistic support for effective teaching by school Heads, ineffective monitoring of teaching and learning by Heads of Visual Arts departments and schools, and non-use of teaching and learning support materials that are undermining successful student learning for high academic achievement in GKA would require urgent intervention from the District and Regional Directorates of Ghana Education Service through active monitoring to ensure strict compliance with policy guidelines concerning effective teaching, learning and school administration by Circuit Supervisors towards raising student achievement in these schools. Active monitoring of teaching and learning processes by Heads of Visual Arts departments and collaboration with colleague teachers could also generate conversations of mutual interest to addressing the instructional resource deficiencies that hamper enhanced curriculum delivery in GKA and student achievement in the schools. It is recommended therefore that the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service take immediate steps to evaluate the Visual Arts programme and ensure that it is adequately resourced and actively monitored to ensure effective teaching and learning outcomes.

Subsequent to this study, the authors are investigating the possibility of piloting an intervention workshop to introduce the respondent teachers and heads of the sampled schools to Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles and how knowledge of their espoused benefits could inform the planning and implementation of student-centred lessons that capitalize on students' strengths of intelligence to improve efficiency of curriculum delivery and raise student achievement in General Knowledge in Art.

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Table 1: The Target Population

Classes	School A		School B		School C		School D		Total
	VA	HE	VA	HE	VA	HE	VA	HE	
SHS 1	64	61	60	112	40	13	49	7	406
SHS 2	63	62	83	115	35	10	78	15	461
SHS 3	56	56	45	67	30	8	74	7	343
SHS 4	45	44	45	45	30	7	40	3	259
Sub-Total	228	223	233	339	135	38	241	32	1469
Total	451		572		173		273		1469
Teachers	2		3		1		3		9
Storekeepers	1		1		1		1		4
Librarians	1		1		1		1		4
Grand Total	455		577		176		278		1486

Source: Field research, 2011.

Fig. 1: Students' Learning Styles

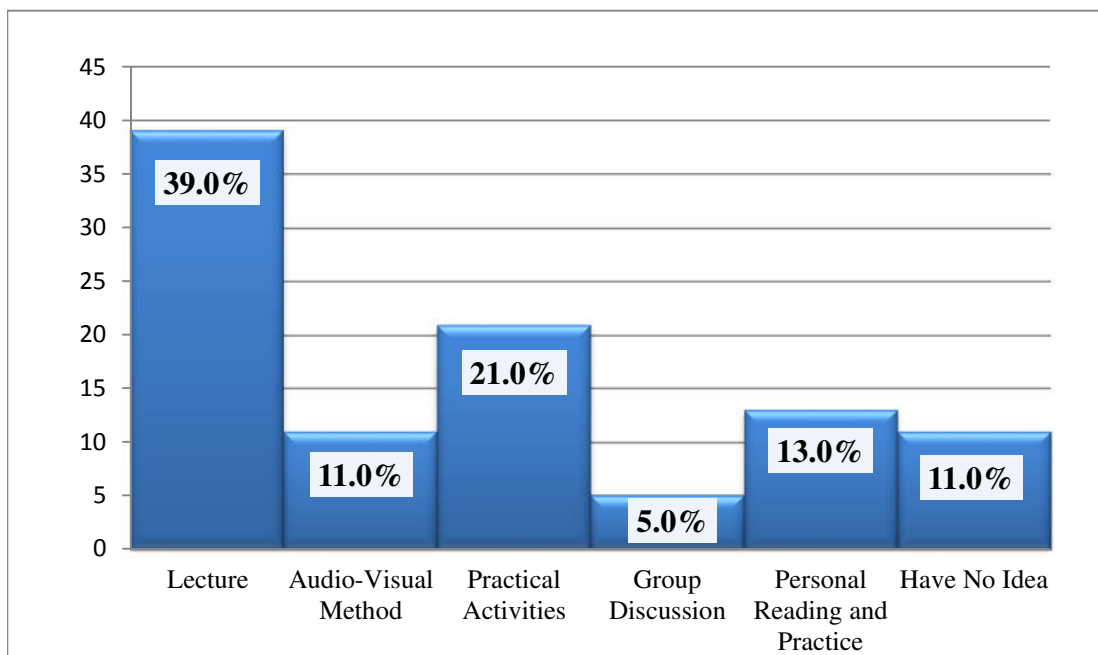


Fig. 2: Teaching Methods mostly used in the sampled schools

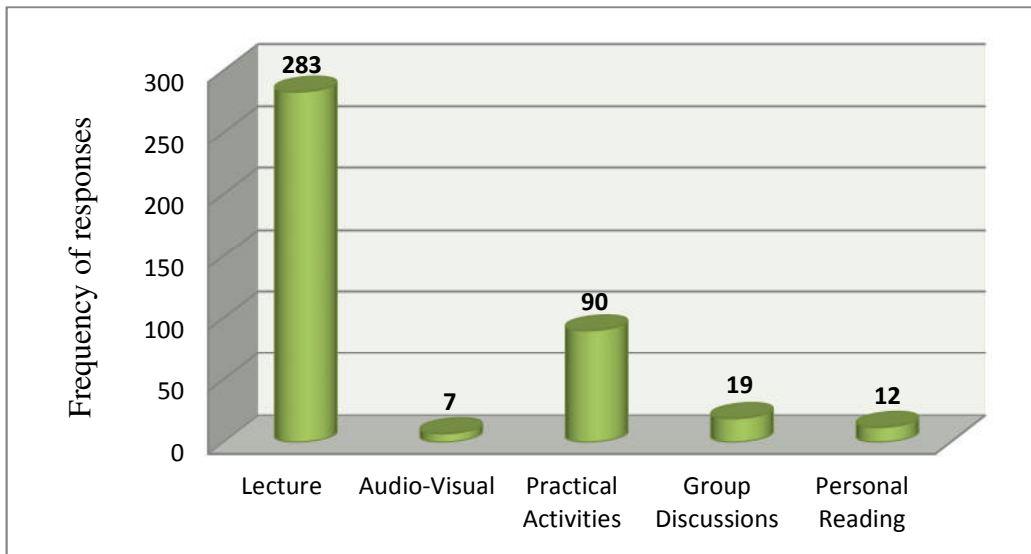


Fig. 3: Frequency of Art Exhibitions

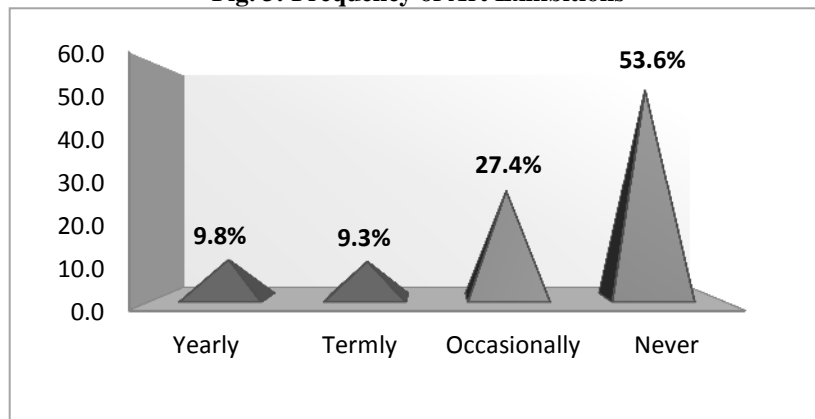


Fig. 4: Frequency of practical assignments in GKA

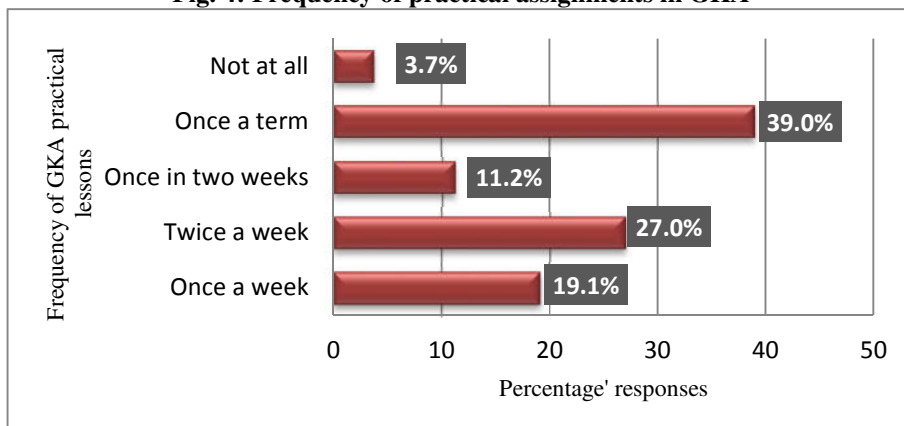


Table 2: What makes GKA interesting to the sampled students

Items	Motivation Factors	Frequency	Percentages
1.	How the teacher teaches	145	35
2.	Personal reading and practice	200	48
3.	Encouragement by parents	17	4
4.	Motivation from friends and colleagues	31	7
5.	Invalid answers	27	6
	Total	420	100.0

Fig 5: Students' rating of their own performance



Plate 1 (a)



Plate 1 (b)

Plate. 4. 2: The use of Teaching Resources

Plate 2: Students participating in still life drawing



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