

Teaching and Learning of Visual Arts in Senior High Schools in Ghana

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Abstract

This study used qualitative and quantitative research methods in tandem to compare teaching and learning processes to illuminate differences in students' academic performance gap in Visual Arts in urban, peri-urban and rural Senior High Schools in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The purposive and simple random sampling techniques enabled the sampling of six schools – two in each setting, comprising 120 students and 18 teachers. Using interview, questionnaire and observation to solicit data, the study revealed that urban schools perform better than rural schools because they have prestigious names and character, more qualified teachers, and attract and admit high performance BECE applicants into the Visual Arts programme. In sum, the geographical settings of the school and educational opportunities directly influence the academic performance and achievement of its students. Environmental factors, lack of studio facilities, and differences in teaching methodologies in the different geographic settings seem to influence students' learning and performance.

Keywords: Teaching and Learning; Visual Arts; Rural and Urban education; academic performance.

1. Introduction

The educational system of any nation is a mirror through which the image of the nation can be seen, shaped and also likely to be shaped. Education, according to many authors, has been and will continue to be the potential cause of change in any society. Education is also meant to develop manpower for different levels of the economy which is an ultimate guarantee of national self-reliance. Hence, the formulation and clarification of purposeful education must emerge the realities of life, taking into account the entire scope of human life and at the same time, considering specific needs of the individual (Von Glasersfeld, 1995; Singh and Rana, 2004).

According to Ryan & Cooper (1992), little has changed in secondary education over the last 100 years. A change of courses has been made but little changes have occurred in living patterns, values, technologies and careers. Also, changes have emerged from examinations, school programmes, subject delivery and the end product of school learning. To get abreast with the little changes that have emerged and in recognition of school learning as an evolving process, secondary schools offer a wide range of programme models to meet the needs of students. The secondary education curriculum, according to Nyman and Jenkins (1999), revolves around subjects offered in the World War I era and are being taught by specialists.

Ghana has made better than average efforts to formulate national development plans with different strategies being pursued to raise the living standards of the population and to ensure economic growth. Yet, the urban-biased character of past approaches has left a legacy of extreme disparities in development which reflects in differences between rural and urban areas in terms of demographic and settlement pattern, distribution of social infrastructure and levels of economic activity (UNICEF, 1990).

In Ghana, students in urban as well as rural Senior High Schools (SHS) follow the same curriculum and prescribed syllabi and therefore operate under the same regulations of teaching and learning. Knowing that schools exist in all parts of the country, it is expected that all things being equal, all students, irrespective of the

community they live in, should do well in school. However, it appears performance is at variance with this view. This makes it difficult for parents to accept to have their wards enroll in schools located in rural communities. Despite the government's intervention of distributing SHS applicants fairly across the country through the Computerised School Placement System, parents and guardians try as much as possible to bring their wards who had been placed in rural schools back to urban and the famous schools. It is important that this view is examined by comparing the teaching and learning processes in Visual Arts subjects in selected urban and rural settings to ascertain the factors that account for this situation.

Can this be attributed to the difference in locations and the environments of the schools or other inferential factors are included? It is expedient to understand the apparent rural-urban disparity in student academic achievement and to find out the relevant factors that affect teaching and learning in order to know what influences the teaching of the Visual Arts in these selected schools in the different geographic settings in the Ashanti Region, Ghana. In this study and reflecting a wider consensus, peri-urban school is defined as a school lying at the peripherals of a major town.

1.1 Education in Ghana

Ghanaian schools are characterised as good, average or poor, whether public or private, rural or urban. Grading depends on the quality of output and internal performance of schools with indicators basically measured by students' communication skills and examination results of the pupils or students. The schools are also characterised by large class sizes of up to 70 students per class in urban and peri-urban areas and 30 or less in rural schools. While rural schools lack good infrastructure and facilities, have low enrolment, less qualified teachers and fewer textbooks and other teaching and learning materials, urban schools are generally over-staffed with qualified teachers, over-enrolled, better funded and monitored, have better infrastructure and adequate resources to work with (Opoku-Asare, 2000). The rural-urban disparity impinges directly on teaching and learning output and hence, students' academic achievement. Though the schools are generally seen as similar, only background knowledge of the routines and related regularities associated with schools will enable the outsider to appreciate better what shapes the lives of those who work in them.

Opoku-Asare (2000) reports that the school system in Ghana is also characterised by uniform adoption of textbooks and mixed ability teaching. Teaching is also characterised by the transmission of information, a model that takes its roots in the traditional oral culture outside the school. This telling model of teaching according to King (1990) is the dominant method adopted by many teachers and involves much "pouring in" of knowledge. The teacher is therefore a very significant factor in school education and students achievement. Besides, the Ghanaian school system has an agenda of examinations that deeply affect the organisation of teaching and learning.

Secondary education occurs in Junior and Senior High Schools. Junior High education follows a six year Primary education and lasts for three years. At the end of the period, students take the national Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) which qualifies them to be considered for admission into Senior High Schools of their choice to pursue specialized programmes. Prior to the examination, students are required to fill a form to choose a school and indicate their choice of programme of study based on the various subject offered by the schools (Asihene, 2009).

1.2 The Senior High School Visual Arts Curriculum

The Visual Arts curriculum followed in Senior High Schools consists of eight subjects - Basketry, Jewellery, Ceramics, Graphic Design, Leatherwork, Picture Making, Sculpture, Textiles, and a compulsory General Knowledge in Art (GKA). The choice of programme depends on resources available in each school's area of location. According to the Teaching Syllabus for Visual Arts (2008), each student opts to study three out of the eight subjects: one or two elective from the two-dimensional category (Group A) depending on the school's resources and one from the three-dimensional category (Group B) in addition to GKA which is studied by all Visual Arts students. Successful students are awarded the West African Secondary School Certificate (WASSCE) which enables them access higher education. The syllabus for these course areas have been designed in such a way to provide students who study them adequate foundation knowledge and skills for further education in the respective Visual Art disciplines as well as for self-employment or apprenticeship for those terminating their education at SHS level (CRDD, 2008).

2.0 Research Methods

The probability and non-probability sampling techniques of quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used in selecting samples for the study. Initially, the cluster sampling technique was employed to categorise the schools into rural, peri-urban and urban schools on the basis of the Ghana Education Service (GES) approved classification of schools in Ashanti Region. Having clustered the schools into the three categories, the purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used simultaneously to identify and select a number of schools, teachers and students to divulge the needed data. The purposive sampling technique ensured that only teachers and students in the Visual Arts programme were selected. The simple random technique ensured that all class levels in the selected schools had equal chances of being selected for in-depth study.

According to GES records, there are 89 public Senior High Schools in the Ashanti Region. 42 schools representing 47.9% offer Visual Arts with 18 (42.9%) located in the Kumasi Metropolis in the Ashanti Region. A sample of six single-sex and mixed-sex schools representing urban, peri-urban and rural settings was selected for in-depth study. The sample comprised two schools in each of the three locations. The study respondents consisted of 18 teachers and 120 students. Each participating school therefore provided three teachers and 20 students.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Logistic Support

The fieldwork revealed a relative lack of logistics in almost all the selected schools. Lack was measured by the availability of logistics including art studio, working tables and funding for practical works for the term. The urban schools had relatively greater access to logistics than the peri-urban and rural schools. Although working table was reported to be the most available logistic, a significant majority (63.7%) of the student respondents indicated that they do not have working tables in their schools. This is shown in Table 1.

Majority of the teachers (58.8%) reported they had no working tables in their schools. The data suggest that the further away a school is from the urban centre the least likely they are to have the most basic of the Visual Arts department's need. This was made evident by the fact that the number of respondents who answered 'Yes' to the question of availability of this facility reduced from 20 (50%) in the urban schools to 14 (36.8%) in the peri-urban to 7 (20%) in the rural schools. It is evident here that working tables are least available in rural schools.

From Table 2, the study revealed that in the absence of working table, most of the students (77.0%) use their classroom desks, dining hall tables (14.8%) and unused tables on the compound (8.2%) for practical works. The students also affirmed that classroom desks are the most used alternative (50.0%) by the teachers for practical classes. This shows that both teachers and students frequently use classroom desks for art making which obviously are uncomfortable, rough and not suitable for art purposes, hence, the possibility of no quality work will be produced at the end.

While 17.7% of the students affirmed they had access to art studio in their schools, an overwhelming 82.3% of them indicated they do not have access to art studios in their schools. Similarly, a significant majority of 76.5% of the teachers also indicated that they do not have art studios in their schools. The study indicates that location to some extent influences availability of art studio. Accordingly, availability of art studio in order from the most to the least available are: peri-urban, urban and rural. The details are provided in Table 3.

With regards to the supply of most school infrastructure, the rural areas recorded the least available art studio with 11.8% responses. In dealing with the lack of art studio, the alternative resources used by the students include: classroom, outside the classroom and home spaces. For the teachers, none worked at home as an alternative to the absence of art studio. The most used alternative among the teachers is the classroom space with as many as 84.6%.

According to the student respondents, the least provided logistic in the selected schools is funding. Only 13.4% of the selected students indicated that their schools provide funds for their programmes with 86.6% indicating they do not have access to funding. For the teachers, although majority of them (58.8%) indicated that their departments do not provide funds for the Visual Arts programme, this number is relatively lower than that of the students. The study indicates that compared to the urban areas, there is no significant distinction between the peri-urban and the rural areas in terms of provision of funds for the Visual Arts Department. Table 4 indicates that urban schools are relatively better financed with 17.1% of them responding in the affirmative. However, for the peri-urban and rural schools, there were no significant differences between their respective responses (10.8% and 11.8%) affirmative.

The questionnaire revealed alternative sources of funding as Class contribution, Personal contribution, Teachers and students' contribution. The study indicates that majority of the students (71.3%), in the absence of funding from their departments, make personal financial contributions to purchase materials for practical works.

3.2 Teaching and Teaching Methods

3.2.1 Educational Qualification of Teachers

The study revealed most teachers have a minimum of a first degree qualification while 35.3% of them have Master's Degree. This attests to a generally high standard of education for the teachers but as to how higher education translates into effective teaching in the various Visual Arts subjects is another researchable issue that lies outside the objectives of this paper. However, some variations were observed in the educational qualifications of the teachers in the three study areas which are the disparity in the percentages as shown in Table 5. The table shows that the number of teachers in the rural areas is almost the same as that of the peri-urban area. While the urban schools have more teachers with master's degree, the rural schools have none. The data reflects the rural-urban disparity in resources reported by Opoku-Asare (2000). This suggests that not much has changed in the distribution of educational resources since this last study. As indicated in Table 5, it could be inferred that the urban schools receive more highly qualified teachers who ensure effective teaching and learning than rural schools. The presence of many teachers with higher education qualifications also suggest the students are receiving effective teaching taking into consideration their exposure to further education.

In addition to having higher qualifications than those in the rural schools, the study revealed that most of the teacher respondents have classroom teaching experience that ranges from three years to more than 20 years. Very few of the respondents (6%) have less than three years' teaching experience while a significant of 70% of them have more than 10 years teaching experience. The length of years the teachers had served in the classroom suggests the possibility of them acquiring much knowledge and expertise in sharing, coaching and mentoring of younger teachers, active involvement in decision making in the schools as well as using their rich teaching experience to help the less experienced teachers to raise academic achievement of their students. Table 6 shows a relatively fair distribution of experienced teachers in the urban, peri-urban and rural schools.

From Table 6, while both the urban and peri-urban schools have 83% and 80% of the teachers' responding they had taught for over 10 years, only half of the teachers in rural schools had taught for up to 10 years. The implication is that teachers in both urban and peri-urban areas are more experienced to provide effective teaching and learning than their counterparts in the rural schools. When teachers lack the background knowledge and qualification in Art education, it is obvious they will have little or no idea of the various methods of teaching and how they apply them in classroom or art studio teaching. This confirms Amissah *et al's* (2002) assertion that teaching does not depend on the learner any more than learner depending on the teacher.

The study found that all the teachers in the selected schools use the same method of teaching. That is in the classroom but according to James (1996), technical demonstration by teachers teaches students the nature of creative art and helps students go beyond school learning. This method of teaching practical work as a theory lesson by teachers does not fulfill the rationale for the programme which is to equip the student with the necessary creative skills and acquire competency (CRDD, 2008). The teachers in the sampled schools complained that the teaching periods allocated to their subjects are not enough and this makes it difficult for them to arrange practical and studio.

As Short *et al* (1991) and Crocker (1991) indicate, teachers have control over seatwork, drills and practical exercise thereby maximizing achievement when teachers emphasise on academic instruction as their main goal. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) also attest that the more specific facts, concepts and skills are taught, the larger the ideas and processes gained. The study revealed that even though there were no studios for the various subjects, some of the Visual Arts teachers organise practical lessons under trees on the school compounds for their students during leisure times. Hayford's (1998) observed that Ghana has examples of teachers who have redefined their teaching roles or responsibilities with the view of making a difference. On the other hand, it is to the disadvantage of the day students and the teachers who do not live on the school compound since they will have little or no practical lessons.

In observing teaching and learning processes in the sampled schools, the following indicators were used: learning methods, frequency of lessons and frequency of practical lessons. The study found that 70.6% of the teachers use between 11 and 20 periods a week for teaching while 23.5% of them teach more than 21 periods a week. The implication is that those with enough instructional periods have more time for both practical and theory lessons as the syllabus demands. The findings did not reveal any significant differences in the correlation between location and the number of teaching periods of the sampled teachers. However, the rural areas came up

as the location where quite a significant percentage of teachers (16.7%) have below 11 teaching periods per week.

From the study, most of the respondents indicated that the periods are enough for their lessons with as many as 76.5% of the respondents. However, the number of teachers who indicated that their teaching periods are not enough forms 23.5% of the respondents. Although this is in the minority, the figure is quite significant as the data suggest that most of the schools have six teaching periods for each of the three Visual Arts electives; the least number of periods being five hours. This indicates that practical lessons are inadequate.

The study shows that to a large extent, teachers use most of the contact hours effectively with as many as 82.6% of the student respondents indicating that their teachers use up all the lesson periods. It further shows that the likelihood for a teacher to utilise all the lesson hours is highest in peri-urban schools in comparison to urban and rural schools. This indicates that teachers in urban schools are less likely to utilise their allotted contact hours as indicated by 23.1% of the students and 86.5% for the peri-urban schools.

Given the importance of practical lessons in Visual Arts education, this has the potential to negatively affect the performance of the students. The study also revealed that as many as 69.9% of the students indicated that they have between one to three practical lessons per term with 50.5% of the students indicating that they have practical lessons only once in a term. However, a quarter of the students indicated that they have more than five practical lessons in a term. The data further shows that the tendency for students to have a single practical lesson per term is highest in rural schools with 67.9% response. The most important reasons given by the students for choosing a particular learning method was the need to acquire different ideas and understanding with response rates of 34.5% and 33.6% respectively.

On the issue of specialisation of teaching, the responses are that majority of them (57%) are teaching in their specialised subject areas with 43% of them teaching different subjects they did not specialised in. The comparison between what the teachers are currently teaching and the Visual Arts areas they specialized in as revealed from the interviews showed that all the teachers in the urban schools are teaching in their specialised disciplines while only 25% of teachers in the peri-urban area are teaching their specialized subjects; the large majority of the total (75%) were found to be teaching different subjects. The teachers who are not teaching their specialised subject areas and those teaching different subjects formed 50% of respondents in the rural schools. The implication is that the urban school teachers are more likely to teach effectively since they have specialised skills and knowledge in the subjects they are currently teaching. This confirms Brunner (1966) that people come out best when they are put to do what they can do better.

Furthermore, 59.5% of the students responded affirmative that teachers' response to lessons is encouraging with only 11.7% being on the contrary. It is also seen by the location of schools that most students in the peri-urban areas have their teachers' response to lessons being encouraging followed by the urban with 64.1% and 60.0% responses respectively. The rural schools have as much as 34.4% of their total responses indicating their teachers' response to lessons is not encouraging. This suggests that teachers in rural schools are less likely to motivate their students to achieve good results.

3.3 Learning and Learning Methods

3.3.1 Subject Combination

The study shows that the students have limited choice in elective subjects because the schools do not offer them exposure to all the disciplines; this is a limitation on the creative development of the students' full potentials towards a future vocation in the Visual Arts. With the variety of subject combination in the urban schools, students have the ability to choose whiles to the peri-urban and rural, it is to their disadvantage because it gives them the Hobson choice from a limited subject combination. The implication is that students in the peri-urban and rural schools would be limited in skills and knowledge acquisition since they do not have enough subject options. This limits the motivation they brought to the programme (Kochar, 2004; Curzon, 1996). Also, students in the peri-urban and rural schools have a limited choice in gaining admission into higher institution in terms of grades obtained in their two electives. However, those in the urban schools can choose the best two out of the three electives to gain admission to higher education.

According to the students interviewed, the teachers' response to lessons in the rural schools is not encouraging. Observation confirmed that either the teachers come to class late and leave on time or they teach into the next period or come in early and leave early. Also teachers, especially those in the rural schools, come to class without any textbook, their attendance to classes and lessons are usually not planned. For effective learning to take place teachers are expected to carefully plan procedures and activities that the students will undergo (Singh

and Rana, 2004) but teachers in the selected schools go to class without any prepared lessons plans. They also use the latter part of the lesson or time prior to teaching for chatting and doing other things not related to the subject matter. This can minimize achievement and performance.

School culture as in outdoor activities such as speech days are known to be very important for school improvement (Wheeler and Richey, 2005). Well-behaved and brilliant students can be celebrated on such occasions. The findings suggest that a little over half the student population in the selected schools had not witnessed any speech and prize giving days in their schools. However, an overwhelming majority (94.9%) of the sampled students in the urban schools responding that they had witnessed occasions when the Visual Arts department exhibit their works on speech days. Contrary to this, an overwhelming majority (94.4%) of students in the peri-urban and rural schools indicated that they had never witnessed a speech day before.

3.4 Conclusions

Although the study was done on a small scale, the data presented points to an urban-rural bias in the development of Senior High Schools and diversity of programmes offered the students in those schools. The disparity between the geographic locations of the schools also seems to reflect the differences in resources. The Visual Arts programme in particular seems to be suffering so much in terms of lowered criteria for admitting students, inadequate funding for the various elective areas, high number of instructional periods handled by few teachers in the respective subjects of specialisation, unfair distribution of social infrastructure, and funding for the programme to enable the teachers have adequate resources to teach the students.

The number of elective Visual Arts subjects offered in the schools also places serious limitations on the knowledge and skills that the students could absorb on the programme. In view of this, the peri-urban and rural schools have poor output while the urban schools do well and score high grades in the WASSCE. The identified differences between the schools have to be resolved through adequate resourcing, infrastructure, and effective leadership in order to address the rural-urban disparity and enhance academic achievement for students across the country.

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Table 1: Location and availability of Working Table

Availability of Working Table	Location of school						Total
	Urban		Peri-urban		Rural		
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
Yes	20	50.0	14	36.8	7	20.0	41
No	20	50.0	24	63.2	28	80.2	72
Total	41	100	37	100	34	100	112

Source: Fieldwork, 2009

Table 2: Alternatives to Working Table

Alternatives to Working Table	Students		Teachers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Classroom desk	47	77.0	5	50.0
Dining Hall table	9	14.8	3	30.0
Unused tables	5	8.2	2	20.0
Total	61	100	10	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2009

Table 3: Location and Availability of Art Studio

Availability of Art Studio	Location of school						Total
	Urban		Peri-urban		Rural		
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
Yes	6	14.6	10	26.3	4	11.8	20
No	35	85.4	28	73.7	30	88.2	93
Total	41	100	38	100	34	100	113

Source: Fieldwork, 2009

Table 4: Location and Availability of Funds

Availability of Funds	Location of school						Total
	Urban		Peri-urban		Rural		
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
Yes	7	17.1	4	10.8	4	11.8	15
No	34	82.9	33	89.1	30	88.2	97
Total	41	100	37	100	34	100	112

Source: Fieldwork, 2009

Table 5: Location and Educational Qualification of Teachers

Qualification	Location of school					
	Urban Area		Peri-Urban Area		Rural Area	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
First Degree	1	16.7	3	60.0	5	83.3
Postgraduate Diploma	1	16.7	0	0.0	1	16.7
Master's degree	4	66.6	2	40.0	0	0.0
Total	6	100	5	100	6	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2009

Table 6: Location and Work Experience of Teachers

Duration	Location of school					
	Urban		Peri-Urban		Rural	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Below 3 years	0	0.0	1	20.0	0	0.0
4-10 years	1	16.7	0	0.0	3	50.0
11-20 years	3	50.0	2	40.0	1	16.7
Above 21 years	2	33.3	2	40.0	2	33.3
Total	6	100	5	100	6	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2009

Table 7: Combination of Elective Subjects Studied by students

Elective Subjects	Location of School							
	Urban		Peri-urban		Rural		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Graphic Design, Picture-Making and GKA	12	27.3	15	38.4	-	-	27	23.3
Graphic Design, Textiles and GKA	11	25.0	21	53.9	8	24.2	40	34.5
Graphic Design, Picture-Making, Sculpture and GKA	8	18.2	-	-	-	-	8	6.9
Graphic Design, Picture-making, Textiles and GKA	13	29.5	-	-	-	-	13	11.2
Textiles, Picture-making and GKA	-	-	3	7.7	4	12.1	7	6.0
Graphic Design, Ceramics and GKA	-	-	-	-	21	63.6	21	18.1
Total	44	100	39	100	33	100	116	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2009

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