

## EXPLORING THE STATE OF CREATIVE ARTS EDUCATION IN GHANA: THE CLASSROOM TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the state of creative arts education in Ghana by asking primary school teachers about their experiences teaching the creative arts since its implementation in 2007. The study examines the respondents' personal experiences and training, as well as their perceptions of arts education. In-depth interviews with participants reveal the significant impact their interactions with various art disciplines have on their roles as facilitators of creative arts in schools. The findings identify a variety of approaches that facilitators use for teaching and learning activities. This research not only uncovers insights into the educational value that each teacher assigns to Creative Arts as a subject but also highlights their levels of confidence and preparedness to teach these disciplines. Both generalist and specialist primary teachers participating in this study identify several issues they believe act as barriers to teaching the creative arts effectively.

**Keywords:** *Creative arts, arts education, music education, teaching and learning, curriculum design*

## **Introduction**

The creative arts are widely recognised as powerful expressions of human creativity, as evidenced by numerous references in art history, theory, and educational literature (EganadelSol, 2023; Liggett, 2023). Historically, art has nurtured societal desires and aspirations while promoting civility and peace. Creative Arts Education significantly enhances the human condition, offering intrinsic and extrinsic benefits that improve quality of life. Assertions that art can uplift the spirit, foster civility, and inspire moral conduct through its profound appeal have become commonplace (Caruso, 2014). Despite this, the understanding of creativity and perceptions of the arts within African societies, particularly in Ghana, remain contentious.

Despite recent economic growth, Ghana continues to grapple with deep-seated poverty (Ochi, 2023). Consequently, generating creative ideas for societal change has been slow. Education is recognised as essential for rapid economic development (Jahantab, 2021; Litsareva, 2017), yet it must foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Over the years, Ghana's basic school curriculum has undergone significant revisions to unlock citizens' potential for national development. Among these revisions was the introduction of the Creative Arts curriculum in 2007, designed to cultivate critical, scientific, and imaginative thinking in primary school students while laying the groundwork for design and technological skills (NaCCA, 2018).

Approximately twelve years later, Ghana's basic education system is undergoing another transformation with the implementation of a new Standards-Based Curriculum. Former President Nana Akufo-Addo highlighted this shift in his third State of the Nation Address, noting that the new curriculum developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) focuses on strengthening the acquisition of the 4Rs (reading, writing, arithmetic, and creativity) as foundational skills for lifelong learning. This change aligns with international best practices advocating for a five-year review of the school curriculum.

Despite the positive intentions behind the Creative Arts curriculum, the teaching and learning of this subject have become areas of concern for primary school teachers in Ghana. Challenges include difficulties in interpreting the syllabus (Aboagye & Yawson, 2020), a lack of teaching resources (Aboagye & Yawson, 2020; Cobbold, 2017; Dordzro, 2020), inadequate lesson planning skills (Osei, 2006), and a lack of requisite knowledge among teachers to

effectively implement the curriculum (Adjepong, 2018; Alhassan & Abosi, 2014; Cobbold, 2017). These challenges prompted my interest in this study.

Preliminary observations revealed two significant scenarios underscoring the necessity of this research. First, colleagues teaching Creative Arts in public primary schools—many of whom are generalist teachers – often seek clarification on basic concepts in music and dance. Second, as a part-time Music and Dance tutor at a public university in Ghana, I conducted a pilot study assessing the status of Creative Arts education in schools. Alarming, many teachers did not engage with the performing arts aspects of the curriculum.

These scenarios highlight the challenges hindering the effective implementation of the Creative Arts curriculum in public basic schools in Ghana. Consequently, I decided to investigate the teaching and learning of Creative Arts in public primary schools within the Cape Coast metropolis. This study aims to understand the difficulties associated with the subject and provide recommendations for improvements. The paper is structured as follows: First, the literature review examines existing research on Creative Arts education, focusing on its significance and the challenges faced by educators. Next, the methodology section outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques employed in this study. Following this, the findings will be presented, highlighting key themes and insights gathered from participants. Finally, the discussion will interpret the findings in the context of the existing literature, and the conclusion will summarise the main points and offer recommendations for improving Creative Arts education in Ghana.

## **A Brief Literature Review**

A major concern among Creative Arts education professionals globally is whether generalist primary teachers, with little or no background in the arts, can effectively teach and attain the learning potential of Creative Arts in schools (Adjepong, 2018; Alter, Hays & O'Hara, 2009). Generalist teachers are often perceived as lacking the requisite experience and training to teach the Creative Arts effectively. Holt's (1997) study of art education in the UK found that primary education falls below satisfactory performance in over one-third of schools studied. He notes that most generalist teachers are hardworking but have a limited understanding of materials and lack knowledge about art, attributing this to their training.

The most substantial hindrance to effective teaching and learning of the Creative Arts in primary schools is a lack of confidence among teachers. This diminished confidence leads teachers to feel they are not artistic. Studies indicate that teachers' self-perceptions regarding their artistic abilities directly connect to their effectiveness as Arts educators (Welch, 1995). In a study by Housego (cited in Welch, 1995), two significant factors attributed to a teacher's self-perception were identified: teaching self-efficacy, whether individuals believe they have the skills to assist student learning, and their preparedness to teach. Russell-Bowie and Dowson's (2005) study of 936 generalist primary teachers across five countries revealed that most had very little formal background in any art forms, and that background strongly predicted confidence and enjoyment in teaching, regardless of gender.

Eisner (1997, 2002) and Holt (1997) argue that values and attitudes are fundamental to the role and purpose of Creative Arts in education. Eisner (1997) asserts that we expect generalist primary teachers to teach subjects they do not know or love, which can perpetuate low esteem for the Creative Arts among teachers. Pateman (1991) describes the increasing marginalisation of Creative Arts in British primary schools, attributing this to heightened accountability and national testing in core subjects, alongside teachers' insecurities. He concludes that it is unsurprising that overburdened teachers, feeling insecure in the arts, treat these subjects as peripheral (p. 19).

Problems with primary teacher self-efficacy, values for the Creative Arts, and arts knowledge have been identified in major national research investigations. Alter, Hays, and O'Hara (2009) indicate that generalist teachers are often required to teach all subjects, including "important" subjects like mathematics and literacy, alongside arts education. Wilkins (2009) notes that some subjects are taught more than others, depending on the teacher's confidence and background. Research by Tengepare (2020) shows that teachers bring a variety of backgrounds and confidence levels to their teacher education courses. Jacobs (2008) indicates that many have little prior experience or confidence in art forms, often carrying negative attitudes toward the arts into the school setting.

Local research on creative arts has been conducted by Addo and Adu (2022), Adjepong (2018), Boafo-Agyemang (2010), Nortey, Bodjawah, and Poku (2021), and Opoku-Asare, Tachie-Menson, and Ampeh (2015), among others. However, none of these studies approached

the subject from the teacher's perspective, focusing instead on classroom teachers' personal experiences and training, as well as their views on Arts education.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore the state of Creative Arts education in Ghana from primary school teachers' perspectives. The primary aim was to gather in-depth insights into their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in implementing the Creative Arts curriculum. A phenomenological research design was employed, which is suitable for understanding individuals' lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). This design allows for exploration of how teachers perceive and interpret their experiences in teaching Creative Arts, providing a rich, descriptive account of their perspectives.

A total of twenty primary school teachers participated in this study, selected through purposive sampling from twelve different schools across the Cape Coast metropolis. This method ensured that participants had relevant experience and knowledge regarding the Creative Arts curriculum. The research questions guiding this study focused on teachers' perspectives and how these perspectives influenced their teaching and learning approaches to creative arts. Specifically, the study addressed two questions: (a) What personal and professional experiences shape teachers' understandings of the Creative Arts and pedagogy? (b) How have these experiences shaped teachers' ability to present and form Creative Arts experiences for their students? These questions investigated the key meanings participants assigned to their Creative Arts pedagogical practices.

The main data collection instrument used was in-depth interviews. Before the interviews, I visited schools and attended creative arts classes to gain firsthand insights into the teaching and learning processes. This familiarisation enabled me to identify the twelve schools that comprehensively teach creative arts. The selected schools were purposively chosen to represent institutions committed to offering a full curriculum in creative arts.

In addition to school visits, six focus group discussions were conducted with basic schoolteachers from the selected schools to investigate critical aspects of teaching Creative Arts in primary education. Each focus group, moderated by the researcher, consisted of approximately eight participants. All interviews were audio-recorded. Focus groups are

effective for exploring collective views and experiences, allowing participants to engage in dialogue that reveals deeper insights into social dynamics and shared challenges (Krueger & Casey, 2015). These discussions facilitated an exchange of ideas and concerns, providing a platform for teachers to articulate critical issues they face in delivering creative arts education. This information guided the design of the semi-structured interview guide used in the main data collection and triangulation.

Building on insights from the focus groups, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the most senior creative arts teacher from each of the twelve schools, along with eight additional teachers identified based on their contributions during focus group discussions. In-depth interviews provided access to knowledge about the meanings and interpretations individuals assign to their lives and events (Johnson, 2001). Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in questioning while ensuring key topics are covered, enabling researchers to probe deeper into participants' experiences (Gill and Baillie, 2008). The interviews were spaced out and conducted over seven months (April to October 2018) at participants' campuses, early morning before school, after school, or during breaks, ensuring minimal disruption to their teaching responsibilities.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Naeem et al. (2023), which involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. The analysis process began with familiarisation, where the researcher became acquainted with the data through repeated readings of the transcripts. This immersion allowed for a comprehensive understanding of participants' narratives. Initial coding involved highlighting significant statements and phrases to identify potential themes, distilling the data into manageable segments reflecting participants' experiences. Theme development organised identified codes into broader themes encapsulating participants' experiences, synthesising data to construct a coherent narrative. Themes underwent a review process to ensure they accurately represented the data and addressed research questions, enhancing analysis credibility. Member checking was employed to validate findings; participants reviewed preliminary results to ensure interpretations resonated with their experiences (McKim, 2023).

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Cape Coast's Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring they understood the

research purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, with pseudonyms used in reporting to protect participants' identities.

## Results

Demographic information was gathered on all participants. A summary of the participants' backgrounds is provided in Table 1. This table includes the participants' pseudonyms used to identify and distinguish between the participants to ensure anonymity. It includes their gender, context, the classes they teach, their age, and their teaching experience.

**Table 1: Demographic information on participants**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>
Akos	F	Class 4 (A teacher in an Urban school)	30-40	11 years of experience
Nancy	F	Class 2 (A teacher in a Rural school)	40-50	17 years of experience
Joe	M	Class 3 (A teacher in a Rural school)	30-40	12 years of experience
Kofi	M	Class 4 (A teacher in a Rural school)	25-30	8 years of experience
Abena	F	Class 6 (A teacher in a Rural school)	30-40	15 years of experience
Krakari	F	Class 1 (A teacher in an Urban school)	50-60	25years of experience
Atsu	M	Class 5 (A teacher in an Urban school)	40-50	14 years of experience
Lizzy	F	Class 5 (A teacher in an Urban school)	25-30	10 years of experience

Adzo	F	Class 3 (A teacher in an Urban school)	30-40	24 years of experience
Afia	F	Class 2 (A teacher in an Urban school)	50-60	20 years of experience
Joan	F	Class 6 (A teacher in an Urban school)	30-40	9 years of experience
Jane	F	Class 6 (A teacher in an Urban school)	25-30	10 years of experience
Datsa	M	Class 4 (A teacher in a Rural school)	30-40	12 years of experience
Wobube	F	Class 3 (A teacher in a Rural school)	25-30	8 years of experience
Isa	M	Class 2	30-40	14 years of experience
Maria	F	Class 1	30-40	12 years of experience
Bright	M	Class 5	25-30	10 years of experience
Julie	F	Class 1	50-60	27 years of experience
Mina	F	Class 3	40-50	17 years of experience
Ese	F	Class 4	40-50	16 years of experience

As shown in Table 1, participants represented a variety of backgrounds and ages (between 20 and 60 years). The participants' level of expertise in teaching the Creative Arts was one of the factors that determined who was targeted to participate in the study. The teachers included in the study had varying levels of teaching experience. The participants included both male and female teachers, even though female teachers make up the vast majority of all primary schools visited. The participants taught at various levels in primary school, including different classes

and stages from primary one to primary six. The sample included schools with varying student populations, ranging from one-teacher schools to very large multi-class per grade schools with a high proportion of students; schools located in urban and rural areas. The diverse backgrounds and characteristics of both participants and schools provided a typical cross-section of schools and teacher profiles in the Cape Coast metropolis.

The findings revealed several concerns raised by participants about the teaching expectations of the primary school curriculum, particularly the learning outcomes for the Creative Arts. Several factors were identified as impediments to meeting all teaching expectations. A summary of some of the key issues that teachers frequently referred to in their interviews included the following: interrelated issues of time and the quantity of curriculum material requiring coverage, the broad scope of subject content within the Creative Arts, teachers' evaluation of their own Creative Arts knowledge and skills, the level of confidence expressed by individual teachers to teach performing Arts disciplines, perceptions of the value and status given to the Creative Arts, and gender issues.

### **Time constraints**

The major talking point for all participants has been the issue of time allocation and the quantity of subject matter to be taught at the primary school level. In total, more than twelve participants used the statement “the basic school curriculum is overcrowded” and “we have a crowded primary curriculum” to describe the state of the primary school curriculum in Ghana. It was difficult for these teachers to cope with the extensive number of subjects they were expected to teach, including Creative Arts, which in itself is an integration of Performing Arts, sewing, and Visual Arts. For example, Kakari said, “I just think that the people at the helm of affairs in this country think that primary school teachers are superhumans, and they are supposed to be good at everything, but people are not like that.” Akos disputed the idea that primary teachers could teach anything. She corroborated this by saying, “No teacher can do all areas perfectly...the subjects are just too much for one person to handle.”

Ensnared with priority issues, participants' general feeling of being overwhelmed resulted in most teachers cutting down on the amount of time they devote to Creative Arts instruction in the classroom. Through my interviews with the participants, it became clear that

most of them (about 17 out of the 20 participants included in the study) did not major in any of the performing arts or visual arts strands at the College of Education. This resulted in participants admitting that they teach what they are comfortable teaching. Some even revealed they use the time allocated for the teaching of Creative Arts on the school timetable to catch up on other lessons. This was vividly captured by Abena when she said:

Me, I did not major in Music, Dance, Visual arts, or even Sewing when I was in the training college. The only opportunity I had to do anything in those areas was in my first year of college, when we were introduced to those symbols of music and dance notation and stuff like that. In fact, I don't know how to sing or dance, so I find it very difficult when it comes to the teaching of creative arts. Most times, I use the creative arts period to teach something else, or when it comes to worst, I only ask them to take their workbooks and their pencils and draw or sketch something. I also sometimes ask them to sing one or two songs.

In addition, some teachers felt that the low amount of time they devote to the Creative Arts was a result of the huge amount of time they put into the preparation of teaching and learning materials necessary to facilitate activities in a creative arts lesson. Kofi stated, "The preparation in the Creative Arts takes time, and, as you know, there is not much time in the school day for these sorts of things." Furthermore, the majority of teachers believed that time in the primary classroom was spent on core subjects like English and Mathematics. The increased emphasis on students' literacy and numeracy achievement puts additional demands on their time. In the following reflection, Datsa described a situation in which he felt other subject areas had been neglected. He stated:

In this country, all we think about is examinations, good results, and certificates. Since the creative arts are not offered at the JHS level and are also not examinable, the seriousness that it deserves is not given to the subject. Just take a look at the school timetable, and you will see exactly what I am talking about. Come! Just look (pointing at a sheet of paper pasted on a wall close to the

chalkboard), see the time allocation for English and Maths, and compare it to an integrated subject like Creative arts and the picture will be clear to you.

According to at least eleven other teachers, the priority of specific subjects necessitates a negotiation about how much time can be assigned to Creative Arts. This issue also came up several times during informal conversations with some primary school headteachers.

### **Scope of the subject area**

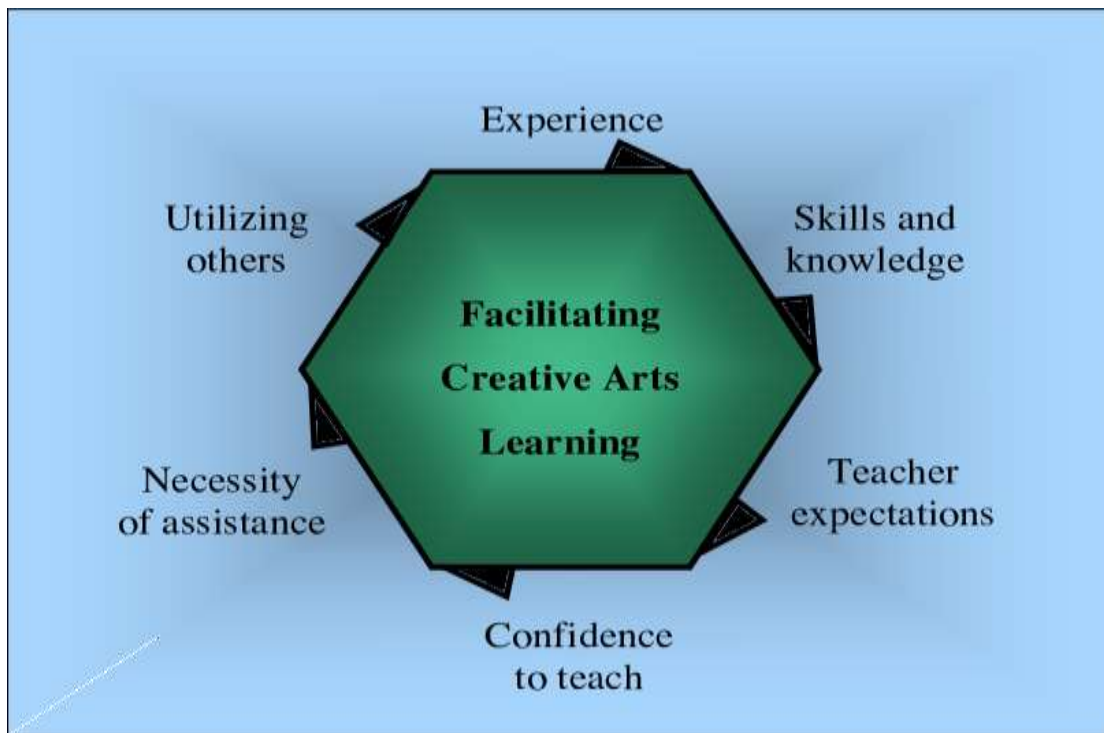
Overall, the expectation of Creative Arts teaching and learning was viewed as unrealistic, requiring a breadth of knowledge and skills that most of the twenty teachers felt they lacked. The scope of the Creative Arts, which includes Visual Arts (Two-dimensional arts: drawing, painting, colour work, printmaking, patternmaking, letting and camera/electronic arts, etc. Three-dimensional art: modelling, casting, carving, weaving, paper craft, sewing/stitching, crocheting, construction and assemblage), and Performing Arts (music, dance, and drama) (NaCCA, 2019, p. xxii), was shown to be very broad, and the teachers thought it was beyond the skills and knowledge of most people. Lizzy, for example, saw this as a huge demand on their personal skills and knowledge. She stated:

I mean, it is asking a bit too much to suggest that a person can actually adequately master the three broad subject areas that make up the creative arts. This is so unthinkable. Especially when we don't even have a course at the Training College with the title Creative Arts, but we are expected by magic to have creative arts teachers. Just look at drama, music, dance, sewing and visual arts, I am not sure if you will get anyone at all in the whole world (laughing) who is good at all of these.

As most of the other teachers in the study agreed, Lizzy also considered it almost impossible, even for those specifically trained in the Performing Arts, to learn and master all aspects of these fields.

## **Experiences, Skills, Knowledge, and Confidence**

A series of sequential stages outlined how experiences, skills, knowledge, and confidence are acquired and dynamically linked (Passarelli and Kolb, 2012). This series of events began with the individual as a child, progressed to a trainee teacher, and finally to a qualified teacher, with each successive developmental stage determined by prior personal experiences with the Creative Arts. Limited and negative experiences in any of the Arts disciplines at any stage of their lives appeared to impede the acquisition of discipline-related skills, lowering the teacher's confidence in teaching the subject. A conceptual model for facilitating Creative Arts learning (Alter, Hays, & O'Hara, 2009) based on the central concepts and themes was adopted. These emergent features form dynamic relationships and interrelationships. This model is shown in Figure 1.

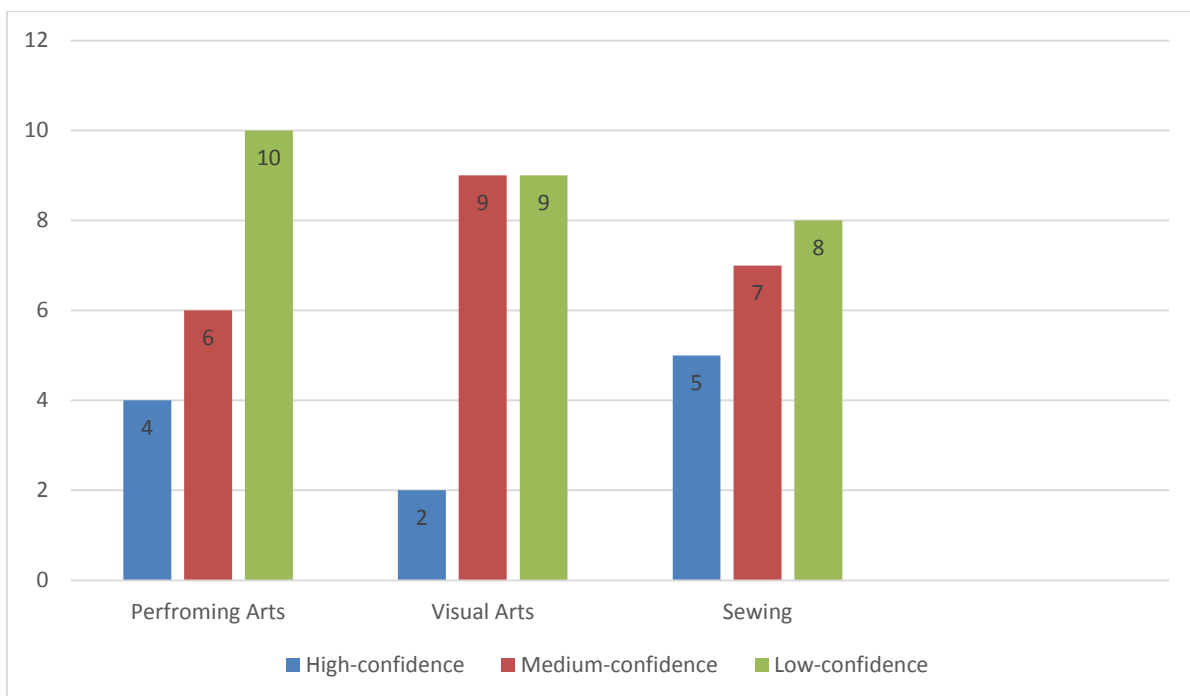


**Figure 1: Conceptual model of creative arts learning (Alter, Hays & O'Hara, 2009).**

A cycle of facilitation is presented in Figure 1 for creative arts learning. The figure depicts how the participants progressed from content knowledge and delivery in the Creative Arts to the application and start of the teaching and learning process. Points in the cycle represent various stages of awareness. These stages highlight the participants' approaches and perspectives

towards Creative Arts as primary pedagogy. The data revealed varying levels of teacher confidence when teaching in the three Performing Arts disciplines. The words and phrases participants used in describing the degree of confidence they had in themselves toward the teaching of Creative Arts were categorised by the researcher into three levels: high confidence, medium confidence, and low confidence.

To begin, words and phrases such as “uncomfortable,” “I’m really hopeless”, “it’s daunting,” and “I have no idea of music, dance, visual art or sewing” suggested a lack of confidence. These words were used by the participants to describe areas where they felt truly uncomfortable. Second, phrases such as “I’m not completely ignorant”, “not as confident as my major area,” “reluctant to teach”, and “not overly confident” indicated a medium level of confidence. Participants’ medium confidence levels indicated that they had reservations about teaching specific aspects of the Creative Arts. Third, statements such as “I’m confident”, “I’ve always felt comfortable”, “I love teaching arts”, and “I just enjoy it” indicated a high level of confidence. Participants demonstrated confidence in areas where they believed they possessed significant skills and knowledge to effectively facilitate student learning, as well as areas where they had personal interests. The above findings are summarised in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2: Bar chart representing confidence levels of teachers**

Generally, a comparison of participants' responses regarding their level of confidence in each subject area, as displayed in the table above, showed that most participants had low confidence levels in teaching all the strands that made up the Creative Arts subject. In sum, we can see how participants' levels of confidence in teaching differ across the three strands in Figure 2.

Surprisingly, each of the participants felt very comfortable discussing areas of the Creative Arts in which they lacked adequate skills and knowledge. Participants also spoke with greater passion and detail about areas where they believed their skill and knowledge levels were higher. Interestingly, six out of twenty respondents stated that they invite resource persons to help them learn various aspects of the Creative Arts. For example, some participants stated that they used resources such as "traditional musicians," "colleagues," and "highly qualified people." This delegation of teaching responsibilities was viewed as a way to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, it was done parsimoniously since most times remuneration for such invitees becomes the burden of the teacher who solicited their help. The delegation of teaching ranged from entire lessons to partial, and lastly, a few teachers also indicated they sometimes work in partnership with supervisors and Culture Coordinators. As many as thirteen participants stated they delegated the responsibility for teaching the performing arts aspect of the Creative arts, cultural and choral activities to other people, three in visual arts and four in sewing. The reason behind the total delegation was that these participants were generally not comfortable teaching these specific subject areas. Ese and Kofi, who are teachers coming from the same school, revealed the creative manner in which they handle the situation in their school. In their school, it was a consensus among the teachers to dedicate Fridays to the study of the Creative arts. So what happens is that, after spending some time in their respective classes, the students later congregate outside for Creative Arts. By doing this, the deficiencies of the individual teachers are taken care of by other teachers who are more capable of teaching various strands of the curriculum.

In general, participants felt that their skills and knowledge in each of the Creative Arts strands were insufficient for effective delivery. As many as sixteen participants reported that their pre-service teacher training in the Creative Arts was inadequate and that they were extremely dissatisfied with their experiences. Mina, for example, when asked to describe the training she had received, explained:

Hmmmm, everything was just so wrong from the beginning. My knowledge of the Arts is just so poor. Most of us didn't have the opportunity to study music, dance, drama or even visual arts at the basic school or Senior High level. At Teacher Training College, I had to do Music and Dance for just one semester, and then for sewing, I can remember doing a little of that at Junior High School.

Mina, like many of her colleagues, was pretty much disappointed in the educational system and felt she should have gained a lot more from her Basic, Senior secondary, and tertiary educations.

There were some differences in how younger and older teachers viewed their initial pre-service Arts education training based on their work experience. Teachers with twenty or more years of teaching experience stated that they were exposed to music and dance during their teacher training, but they did not take it seriously. Other participants with five to ten years of teaching experience indicated that they had been exposed to music, dance, and drama in bits and pieces within the context of the Creative Arts. However, it was interesting to note that, while each participant admitted to having some level of art tuition, they all presented their teacher training as limited.

### **Teachers' Value of the Arts**

All twenty participants in the study believed that the Creative Arts had value in education and society. These teachers focus not only on their own subject-related values but also on their perceptions of the values and attitudes held by students and society as a whole. On a personal level, participants expressed their appreciation for the Creative Arts for providing foundational skills for learning and development. They described how they used the Creative Arts to "develop fine motor skills," "aid in the development of social skills," "develop student confidence," and "enrich learning throughout the curriculum as cross-curricular programming."

Even though they valued the Creative Arts for their role in promoting these outcomes, the findings also revealed that societal values and attitudes may have limited the scope of the Creative Arts. It was noted, for example, that there was a general perception that learning in the Arts was not considered a serious academic exercise, but rather a hobby. In part, this may have

explained why many of the teachers made comments that were related to how the Creative Arts were 'not as academic' as other curriculum areas. Many also admitted that Creative Arts subjects were not taken seriously and that the priority given to them was often lower compared to other areas within the primary curriculum.

Participants frequently revealed their preference in one or two of the Creative Arts strands during our interview sessions, but these were mostly hobbies they developed as children. Seven of the participants interviewed mentioned family support as a major influence. According to these individuals, their families had both positive and negative influences on their interests and skills development. People like Datsa, Bright, and Isa chose Music and Dance as their major against the wishes of their parents. On the contrary, Joan, Lizzy, and Jane indicated their families were supportive of their engagement in the performing arts as children by providing them with opportunities to learn some musical instruments outside of school. These were regarded as hobbies developed casually over time.

When asked about the status of arts education in Ghana, fifteen participants believed that certain negative dominant opinions and perceptions had contributed to its low status. Several participants stated that their students are always excited and interested in Creative Arts as a subject, but parents' and other people's attitudes discourage them. Participants, including Afia, stated that families had narrow perceptions of the Creative Arts. For example, Afia said:

I know that some of my students have special talents and skills, and I am sure their parents know that too. But they never actually think that there is a career to be made out of it, or that there is a life that can be filled with it. For example, we have this kid who is very good at visual arts; this guy can sketch anything he sets his eyes on, but his parents refused to get him crayons, a paint brush, and the necessary things he needed to develop his talent. They think it is a waste of time to paint. Every parent wants their child to become a lawyer, doctor, engineer, and so on. No parent wants their child to take up a career in the performing or the fine Arts. They see it as the final resort if there is nothing else to turn to.

In her opinion, many people continue to believe that the Creative Arts are just for entertainment and relaxation without a useful or economic purpose. This meant that not only is there less pressure on schools to strengthen their Creative Arts programmes, but parents also do not pay much attention or invest in training their wards in the Arts in and/or outside of school.

Afia discussed at length the wide range and possibilities of learning experiences provided by current teaching practices. She expressed deep regret for the deficiencies and gaps in her own education. Overall, participants stated that they valued the field because of the outcomes and opportunities it provided. This value encompasses both the confidence that students can gain as learners and the growing demand for Creative Arts skills in a variety of occupations.

### **Religious Orientation and Gender Issues in Creative Arts Education**

The findings also revealed that religion and gender are significant influences on how students practice and experience various aspects of the creative arts. Overall, nine teachers reported that religious practices and gender differences had a significant impact on the types of activities that could be offered to students in the Creative Arts. In many of the interviews, participants differentiated between Christian, traditional, and Islamic religions, describing how teachers and students reacted to specific activities. For example, Kevin said, “The girls like making things with their hands, weaving, all that sort of stuff. Boys not so much, the boys like the drawing and the painting.” Kevin, like the other teachers who mentioned gender differences, believed that students responded to different aspects of the arts based on gender stereotypes in their communities.

The issue of gender bias was most pronounced when teachers discussed the subject of the playing of traditional instruments, especially the traditional drums. Some teachers mentioned heavy neglect of female students studying drumming. Many of them believed that a major contributing factor was the fact that female students found drumming to be a thing for boys. For example, Jackie stated, “A lot of girls aren’t particularly enthusiastic about playing traditional instruments.” Jackie explained:

There are these traditional beliefs that girls do not drum. Girls are not even allowed to get near or touch these instruments. I once had this girl in my class

who was quite good at playing the drums, so I selected her to represent my school in the playing of the *atumpan* (talking drum) at the Inter-school Festival of Arts and Culture. My decision did not go well with the other teachers, including my headmaster, so they substituted her for a boy. She was not allowed to develop her talent in drumming.

It was interesting to note that, based on the religious affiliations of teachers and the belief that traditional instruments possess certain mystical powers or spirits, some teachers avoided the teaching of traditional music and dance, and this meant practical lessons in the subject area were often forfeited. In this sense, teachers' likes and dislikes potentially affected the regularity and attention paid to the Arts in the schools. However, great efforts were being made on the part of some teachers to move away from stereotyped gender roles and religiosity. Isa, who is a Muslim, has this to say:

I find my students so creative and so energetic they never think twice about performing in music, dance, or drama. Despite my Islamic background, I took the performing arts seriously since I knew that my job as an educator included teaching the performing arts. Things are changing a bit these days. Whereas fifteen or so years ago, where I am coming from, parents would object to their wards engaging in the performing arts. Even today, I have other Muslim friends who are teachers teaching at the primary level, but still do not teach the performing arts strands of the creative arts.

It is also important to note that both teachers' and students' families, home backgrounds, and upbringing are influential in shaping how they experience and perceive the Creative Arts (Alter, Hays & O'Hara, 2009).

## **Discussion**

This study demonstrates how the participants' life experiences influenced how they approached and taught the Arts subjects. Participants' skills, knowledge, and confidence in teaching each subject area were all directly related to their prior experiences in the Creative Arts. Teachers'

perceptions of their level of Creative Arts experience significantly influenced their initial engagement in pre-service training, which inevitably shaped how they later approached and facilitated students' experiences. The skills and knowledge acquired through education before becoming a primary school teacher appeared to be a significant predictor of their level of confidence. In turn, these levels of confidence influenced the intensity of instruction in each of the Creative Arts strands. Positive Arts experiences among teachers represented the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and confidence, which they claimed they could later apply to quality Arts instruction in the classroom.

Participants' responses indicated that they were largely overwhelmed by the demands of teaching content knowledge and skills in all Creative Arts subjects in the primary classroom. All the respondents believed that it was impossible, even for those who had received formal training in the arts, to know and teach all aspects of this field. Teachers who believed they lacked Arts experience, knowledge, and skills in one or more of the Creative Arts subjects found it difficult to develop students' understanding in these areas. The majority of these teachers stated that they either taught to their strengths by focusing on the creative arts strand in which they felt most confident, or they delegated partial or full responsibility for teaching to others with greater expertise. However, the delegation of teaching does not happen frequently due to a lack of funds to remunerate the resource persons. The findings show that teachers were most confident in teaching visual arts and least confident in teaching sewing and performing arts, particularly music. This finding partially corroborates Bodilly, Augustine & Zakaras (2008), who revealed that “music and visual arts tend to be taught more than the other art forms” (P. 1). The participants attributed their lack of confidence to insufficient training in the performing arts, the complexities of music, dance, drama as a discipline, and a perceived lack of personal musical ability. The majority of participants used straightforward approaches to introduce students to the performing arts, with an emphasis on developing fundamental skills. In contrast, the approach taken in the visual arts demonstrated to participants that students were not only given structured learning tasks but also allowed to express their creativity. They described how they allowed students to explore a variety of visual arts media and activities in the classroom.

All of the teachers in the study agreed that the quality and quantity of Arts education they received at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels did not adequately prepare them for their current role as creative arts teachers. This finding supports Russell-Bowie and Dowson's (2005) study of 936 generalist primary teachers from five countries, which found that the majority of teachers had little formal training in any of the art forms. Many of the participants mentioned the limited number of learning activities in their pre-service tertiary courses. The frequency with which comments are made about a lack of depth and relevance in these courses indicates that Creative Arts education curricula at this level require reform. Aside from improving the effectiveness of tertiary teacher-training programmes, the findings of this study indicate that there is an urgent need for increased support for qualified teachers in the classroom. Most participants described a situation in which they received little or no in-service training and support when the Creative Arts Syllabus was implemented in schools.

One possible solution to help improve the situation is to organise workshops and more training programmes to compensate for the teachers' lack of prior art experience. Though it may present its own set of challenges, as research has shown that it is difficult to compensate for a lack of Arts background in teacher training programmes (Barton, Baguley, & MacDonald, 2013), it is the only option available under the current circumstances. The challenges associated with the creative arts are not limited to the current context. Many studies have been conducted on the various strands of the creative arts in other parts of the world, such as Ashton (2016) on Visual Arts, Wright (1999) on Drama, Franklin (2000) on Music, and Power and Klopper (2011) on Dance, and all discovered the same or similar challenges.

Though the data for the current study were collected in 2018, before the implementation of the new standards-based curriculum in 2019, the issues raised in this paper remain relevant because the creative arts curriculum was not significantly revised in 2019. The only change was to remove the sewing component, leaving the performing arts (music, dance, drama) and visual arts, which continue to place a significant burden on classroom teachers. There is an urgent need to evaluate creative arts teaching and learning in Ghanaian basic schools so that all issues concerning its implementation can be addressed.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by primary school teachers in effectively balancing their teaching responsibilities in the Creative Arts. It identifies several practical issues and curriculum considerations that influence teachers' approaches, contributing to a better understanding of the values and attitudes impacting creative arts education in primary schools. The findings highlight a contentious issue in Ghana's primary education system: whether it is realistic to expect primary teachers to effectively teach all aspects of the curriculum, particularly the Creative Arts, without adequate preparation. The study supports the claim that the curriculum places an unreasonable burden on teachers' subject matter knowledge, resulting in Creative Arts suffering more than other subjects. The breadth of knowledge required to teach all Creative Arts subjects effectively exceeds the skills of most primary teachers. Additionally, the study reveals that recent departmental directives have prioritised Literacy and Numeracy, adversely affecting the Creative Arts. Teachers face difficulties in maintaining consistency in the Arts curriculum due to time constraints and the subject's lower priority. There is a significant gap between the expectations of the curriculum frameworks and the art-related preparation available through initial teacher education courses. This raises the critical question of whether this situation can be changed, as teachers often feel inadequately prepared in the creative arts.

Considering the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Teacher Training Division of the Ghana Education Service (GES) should collaborate with Teacher Training Colleges to train specialist Creative Arts teachers. This approach will help address the significant demands of Creative Arts, which general classroom teachers find challenging to teach effectively.
2. Given the integrated nature of Creative Arts and the associated time constraints, educators must develop innovative strategies to maximise learning opportunities. Training student teachers in effective time management, planning, and organisation skills is essential for enhancing productivity and ensuring comprehensive coverage of necessary topics.
3. Active monitoring and supervision of teaching quality are crucial for maintaining educational standards. The Inspectorate Division of GES should work with head

teachers to ensure that all subjects, including Creative Arts, are taught effectively. Head teachers should not only inspect lesson plans but also supervise lesson delivery in classrooms.

4. Addressing the influence of religious orientation and gender in the creative arts classroom is vital. Educators should promote inclusivity, gender equality, and equity to create a supportive learning environment. This can be achieved through discussions and activities that challenge gender stereotypes and expose students to diverse artists and creative works.
5. There is a need for continuous professional development opportunities for generalist teachers to enhance their creativity and teaching practices. Workshops, seminars, and conferences can provide new strategies for engaging students in creative arts activities. Additionally, assigning expert teachers as resource persons across school districts can help disseminate knowledge and best practices.

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