



Factors That Motivate Students' Decisions To Enrol In Visual Arts Programme In Tertiary Institutions In Ghana

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Abstract

The study sought to examine and analyse the factors that motivate student's decision to enrol in Visual Arts programmes in line with their career path in tertiary educational institutions in Ghana.

The main objective of this study was to explore those factors that stand out very crucial in influencing and determining students' decision in the choice of Visual Arts programmes.

The study is purely Qualitative in nature with descriptive analysis approach. To ascertain the factors that motivates students' decision to choose visual arts programmes, this study employed focus group discussion together with qualitative and quantitative data from 120 students enrolled in visual arts programmes in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and Takoradi Technical University (TTU).

The findings revealed that factors that motivate students to choose Visual Arts were based on opportunity of self-employment, carrier choices, passion for the programme, having the needed skills and inspiration from parents and peers. The findings from this study will help teachers and educators have a greater sensitivity to, and a better insight into the programmes.

Keywords: visual arts, motivation, enrolment decisions.

1. Introduction

The choice of a subject major or programme of study could be one of the most important decisions a student can make at the entry point to higher education. A lot of studies have been conducted to establish the various backgrounds and factors which affect the selection choice decisions among students for career or programme of study. Therefore, there are a range of variables that have been identified and investigated to determine their impact on the student choice of programme of study in the university.

The focus of this study is also to explore the various prominent factors that emerge as very critical for student's choice for visual arts as a subject major. The study aims to identify those factors that have a significant influence on student's enrolment decisions and play a vital role in their decision-making process.

The term motivation as described by Riley (2012) is a decision-making process that moves a person to choose desired outcomes and kick start the appropriate behaviour. The understanding is that a driving force within an individual defines the concept of motivation which enables the person to attempt to achieve a goal or to fulfil a need or expectation. Motivation therefore is the inner strength or the inspiration behind all actions. It is the most naked answer to why we do what we do (Danz, 2011). In everyday usage, the term motivation is frequently used to describe why a person does something. According to Kaplan (2000), motivation is either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic

motivation emanates from within the individual and extrinsic is the external factors or forces that drive someone to exert some effort at taking a decision or doing some work.

Generally, there are a range of factors that have been explored and studied by various researchers across the globe, and examined its direction and extent of association with students' enrolment decisions. Various factors have therefore been identified and have traditionally been associated with enrolment decisions on programme of study or career choice among students. This study in effect aims to extend the findings of the previous studies and to identify, examine and analyse the factors which are critical in motivating student's enrolment decisions in tertiary visual arts education in Ghana.

Muraguri, (2011) illustrates the influence of various factors on an individual's choice of career and states that personal values including career expectations, family background, and external factors contribute more to students' career decisions. Kerka (2000) also identifies multiple factors including personality, interests, self-concept, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, role model, social support and available resources such as information and finance as positive motivating factors to career choice. These are clear indications that the range of motivators that influence our students to take a course are nearly as numerous as the number of

students who enrol. For some, enrolment reflects on personal interest, self-concept and career expectations.

For others, it emanates from external factors

According to Sugahara, Boland, & Cilloni (2008), studies conducted since the early 1990's have examined intrinsic motivations such as interest in an area of knowledge and related career opportunities as factors affecting students' preference for their course of study.

Similarly, Mihyeon (2009) recognizes the confidence a student has as a result of having skills and knowledge that can determine how far he or she will go with one's education. This infer that students who believe in themselves have more confidence and are more likely to go as far as necessary for what they want instead of settling for something that is comfortable.

Apart from the inherent factors, Torres (2000) also emphasizes that the family, friends and teachers are external factors influencing students' choice of their major programmes or preferred course of study. All these facts demonstrate that many factors come into play when students are making preference for courses that lead to a career path. It is envisaged that majority of students will normally consider the quality of life they want when they complete school and become adults. Therefore, factors such as academic ability, interest in the field of study, employment security and inspiration from people can all play a role in the decision to enrol on a Visual Art programme at the tertiary level.

Visual Arts is an umbrella term for a broad category of art which includes a number of artistic disciplines from various sub-categories. The visual art programme is a composite one that embraces engrossing artistic activities. Perilo (2010) emphasises that, Visual Arts focus on the creation of works which are primarily visual in nature such as sculpture, ceramics, graphic design, painting and photography. In Ghana the scope of the Visual Arts programme includes: *basketry, ceramics, graphic design, jewellery, leatherwork, picture-making/painting, sculpture, textiles and fashion.*

The contemporary practices in the visual arts at the University level combine skill-based instruction, methods of conceptual exploration and artistic research. Almost all of the disciplines in visual arts combine meaning with making, and students therefore put their artistic skills and vision through engagement with materials and research methods in their studio practices. The scope and content of the visual arts therefore provides adequate foundation and enough knowledge and skills in the creation of two- dimensional and three- dimensional art forms.

Collectively, the individual curriculum of all the visual arts disciplines lay emphasis on acquisition of practical skills. The objective is to give the undergraduate student the opportunity to exercise his/her creative talents in line with the emphasis placed on the acquisition of practical and employable skills. Appreciable number of

students therefore, secure admission into the limited tertiary institutions offering diploma and degree courses in the visual arts programmes every year.

It has been observed that at the pre-tertiary, some students who make excellent BECE grades and make personal decisions to pursue Visual Arts are often diverted into Science which is believed to be ‘the programme for brilliant students’. (Evans-Solomon, 2004, Asihene ,2009 and Adinyira, 2012). The worst situation is where applicants whose grades fall below the acceptable grades for their preferred Business or General Arts programmes are often coerced to do visual arts making it look like a programme fit only for low achievers (Evans-Solomon & Opoku-Asare, 2011). The situation is different after post senior high school where students are not coerced but rather take decision to enrol on visual arts programme. This suggests that there are a range of motivators that influence such students to take decisions to enrol on Visual Arts programmes at the tertiary level.

2. Methodology

The study was purely qualitative in nature which generated narrative or textual descriptions of the phenomena under study. The study was conducted on sampled students studying visual arts at the Takoradi Technical University and KNUST in Ghana. A total number of 120 students were involved in the study and they were selected using purposive and convenient sampling techniques.

Table 1 Number of Participants.

Institution	Male	Female	Total
KNUST	57	15	72
TTU	38	10	48
Total	95	25	120

Source: Field study- 2024

Table 1 presents details of the participants and their respective institutions. A total of 95 males and 25 females were sampled for the study. Fifty-seven (57) males and fifteen (15) females totalling 72 participants were drawn from KNUST. Similarly, 38 males and 10 females summing up to 48 respondents were taken from TTU. It could be seen from the table that a greater proportion of those samples were males. This implies that males dominated in the Visual Arts programmes at both institutions.

Focus group discussions

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was the main data collection tool that was used to gather qualitative data used for the study. Zikmund (2013) describes focus group as a small group discussion about some research topic, led by a moderator who guides discussion among the participants. The method was employed based on the assumption that individuals are more willing to talk about things when they are able to do so within a group discussion format. Dzvimbo (2010) confirms by stating that, using focus group discussions to solicit data from participants enables group interaction and generates a wide range of responses by activating details of perspectives and releasing inhibitions

In each school the FGD involved 12 students made up of females and males from different levels, mainly first and second years. In all, 10 focus groups were involved with 6 held in KNUST and 4 in TTU. The 10 FGDs were engaged together between 1 to 2 hours session at different times to discuss issues that related to this study. Open-ended questions for group discussion were “Why did you choose to enrol in the on Visual Arts programme?”, “Were there any factors that influenced your choice of course?” and “Why is it important to pursue a course in the visual arts?” As a data collection tool, focus group discussions helped the researcher to obtain detailed information related to this study as participants felt more comfortable talking in a group than alone.

All FGD sessions were tape recorded and later played back, and verbatim recorded interviews were transcribed for documentary review in text. The raw data collected was first looked at for emerging themes and recurrent events and was then categorized. The categorization generated more themes that were analyzed, interpreted, conclusions drawn and recommendations made to guide the development of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study intended to explore factors influencing students' interest in their choice of choose Visual Arts programme at tertiary level. Through FGD with the students, a number of reasons that influence their interest in visual arts programmes were categorized and represented in some descriptive themes as presented in the following sub-sections.

1. Opportunity of Self-employment.

Findings of the study show that opportunity of self-employment play a significant role in influencing students interest for visual arts. The following multiple responses from students testify the role of self-employment to students' interests in the visual arts.

It is easy for me to get a job if I pursue this option, Choosing this option will provide me with the skills which will lead to self-employment, I want to establish my own art business and employ others, this option will help me in life manipulations, this option will help to broaden my mind to learn vocational skill, I do not want to work under anybody. (FGD, students, KNUST&TTU, 24/2/2024).

The above extracts indicate that students' interests in visual arts were influenced by their belief in being self-employed. The implication of these results is that respondents had a clear idea about the many opportunities of jobs for students who opt for Visual Arts programmes.

These findings support Throsby and Zedmiks's (2010) view that most artists are self-employed as sole practitioners and business operators who usually work in part-time positions, activities or work from home. It also emphasizes the point that specializing in Visual Arts provides opportunity to acquire and master skills for creating items or products from which the artist can make a living. These emphasise Kquofi, (2012) assertion that Visual Arts in our societies today provide a means of lifelong employment to all artists.

2. Chosen Career

It also emerged that respondents' choice of Visual Arts education was informed by their motivation for a career path in the field of art, which translates simply into the things one wants to achieve in one's career (Uldrass, 2012). As Austin (1993) argues, students who have artistic inclinations are most likely to major in fine art, music, theatre, journalism and English while those with certain personality characteristics are more likely to choose particular majors.

At the JHS level, I was good at Technical drawing. I chose Visual Arts myself.

I was found of Art right from my infancy. At the J.H.S., I elected to pursue Visual Arts myself even though I had aggregate nine.

(FGD, students, KNUST&TTU, 30/2/2024).

3. Passion for the programme

The passion respondents have for the programme also emerged as a motivating factor for some students to enrol in Visual Arts courses. Students passion for Visual Arts programme could be attributed to the fact that visual art is a composite course with diverse disciplines and highly technological, and requires a large degree of computer-based work. It is imagined that students in the senior high schools might have developed interests in creating art works by the use of computers and their technology, especially, with the influx of a wide range of sophisticated software. These interests might have led the students into visual arts which has diverse

disciplines and career paths filled with computer usage and high technology. The following responses attest to the role passion for visual arts play in influencing students decision on programme choice:

I enjoy experimental painting because it entails reading about the specific objects to be studied

I hope to establish my own Art business after leaving school, and also partner a relative who is engaged in the exportation of Artworks

I realized I was a potential artist while at J.H.S. I opted to pursue Visual Arts at the Senior High School myself.

I studied Visual Arts because I had the long standing flair and interest for Visual Arts.

I did painting at the University because I had deep love and passion for Visual Arts.

(FGD, students, KNUST&TTU, 06/3/2024).

The multiple responses imply that these students had already developed a keen interest in Visual arts and most likely, a deep interest in either one of the disciplines in Visual Arts. As Torres (2002) rightly puts it, some students grow up knowing what to do later in life. These are students who may be determined to go the extra mile to reach their dream job. Such students must therefore be encouraged to explore their interests and learn more about their passions.

4. Inspiration and persuasion from other people

Findings from focus group interviews revealed that majority of the respondents had inspiration for visual arts education from other people ranging from parents, teachers, siblings to peers. This manifested in multiple responses during the FGD sessions.

My father is an artist and I also want to be an artist because he gets a lot of money

My teacher said I was good in drawing and painting so I should pursue further in that direction.

I get much inspired when I visit art galleries so it encourages me to pursue art

Artist are highly respected in the society

The services of artist are highly recognised and cherished during state functions

It was imposed on me at the Senior High School. (FGD, students, KNUST&TTU, 12/3/2024).

The extracts indicate that students' preference choice for visual arts were influenced by significant others. The implication of the responses is that most students at times are influenced or persuaded to make a decision that might not have been made by themselves. The influence or persuasion could be from parents, siblings, friends or a teacher. Students therefore, decide to follow what others favour. These persuasion or inspiration from people could be all attributed to the assured prospects, success and high income associated with the people who influenced or inspired them.

It is not surprising that Torres (2000) considers the family, friends and teachers an influential part of students' choice of their major programmes. An interview with a Year 3 Graphic Design student confirmed that he was influenced by one of his teachers at JHS to opt for visual Arts.

5. Acquisition of the Needed Skills

The acquisition of basic knowledge and needed skills in visual arts at the pre-tertiary by some students also influenced their decisions to pursue further in related disciplines in the visual arts. The respondents' indication of having the acquired needed skills is inferred from the multiple verbatim responses recorded.

by virtue of possessing good drawing skills and creativity (Personal Communication, March 20, 2024). he was good at Technical drawing therefore he chose to do Visual Arts by himself.

(FGD, students, KNUST&TTU, 18/3/2024).

Inferring from the responses it is envisaged that many students choose to offer visual arts because they have the academic ability and aptitude to pursue the course for the sake of educational and professional progression. This is an indication of students who have more confidence in themselves and are aspiring to achieve higher in education. This buttresses Mihyeon (2009) statement that, the confidence a student has as a result of having skills and knowledge can determine how far he or she will go with their education. This is an endorsement to the fact that many students choose their major course of study based on their academic ability. Such students had basic knowledge and experience in visual arts at the pre-tertiary and decided to follow the career that their educational choices have opened for them. The finding affirms Morgan, Flanagan, and Kellaghan, (2001; 12) position that students' academic ability is of considerable importance for continuing success in college.

3. Conclusion

The study concludes that there is not a single factor that motivates students when making decision choice on visual arts programmes. Rather, there are multiple variables or factors that stand out very crucial to motivates students' enrolment decisions concurrently, to choose visual arts programmes for career path in tertiary educational institutions in Ghana. The evidence has been established that students' preference choice for career path are guided and influenced by inherent and external or social factors. These factors motivate student intrinsically and drive them towards their desire and personal interest. The factors influence student decisions by developing an appealing stimulus for them to respond towards it. The decisions are revolving around the fact that, students are aware and familiar with the great opportunities for advancement and job placement in the visual arts. Similarly, students' aptitude and abilities induce them to pursue further and attain higher education in visual art programmes for which students believe they are likely to get a job if they pursue visual arts programme.

Based on the findings, it stands to reason that students should be given ample opportunity to make their contributions when decisions on issues that eventually impact on their lives are being taken.

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