



Navigating the Standard-based Creative Arts Curriculum Challenges in Primary Schools: A Qualitative Exploration

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Abstract: This study explores the challenges and coping strategies associated with implementing the Standard-Based Creative Arts Curriculum (SBC) in Ghanaian primary schools. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative case study approach was used to capture the lived experiences of teachers and headteachers from selected public and private schools. Data were collected from two headteachers and six classroom teachers through structured interviews. While the small sample size limits generalizability, it enabled an in-depth examination of practitioner perspectives. Findings reveal a range of institutional, pedagogical, and resource-related barriers to effective curriculum implementation, including inadequate training, lack of materials, insufficient instructional time, and limited policy prioritization of Creative Arts. Despite these constraints, teachers demonstrated resilience by improvising with local resources, adapting culturally relevant content, and engaging in peer collaboration. The study calls for systemic reforms in teacher training, curricular support, school leadership, and resource allocation. It advocates for greater inclusion of teacher voices in policy development, promotion of culturally responsive pedagogy, and future longitudinal, multi-stakeholder research to maintain quality and equality in Creative Arts education both now and in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of standards-based curricula in primary education has become a key focus of educational reform, highlighting measurable outcomes, competency-based progression, and aligned instructional content. Within this framework, Creative Arts such as music, dance, drama, and visual arts face unique challenges, particularly in primary schools. Transitioning to a standards-based approach requires not only changes in teaching methods but also a reassessment of the philosophical foundations of arts education (Boham, 2023). In Ghana, as in many other countries, Creative Arts education has historically been sidelined in curriculum development, teacher training, and resource distribution (Lorenza, 2021). The introduction of a standards-based curriculum has, in some instances, exacerbated these inequities. Teachers often find it difficult to integrate expressive and culturally relevant teaching practices with strict, outcome-oriented criteria while also dealing with inadequate infrastructure and variations in student engagement and access (Brown, 2015; Richardson, 2024). These obstacles not only impede effective

curriculum implementation but also threaten to undermine students' holistic development and creative potential essential aspects of 21st-century learning and national education objectives.

Qualitative studies examining teachers' experiences with standards-based education highlight various challenges, including limited specialised training in creative disciplines, inadequate instructional materials, and the systemic emphasis on numeracy and literacy over the arts (Abroampa et al., 2025; Kwarteng, 2024). These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural and under-resourced schools, exacerbating inequities in access to quality arts education (Zenisek, 2024). Additionally, the Creative Arts' focus on expressive freedom and cultural specificity often conflicts with standardised assessment rubrics, limiting opportunities for genuine artistic exploration (Conway, 2024). Despite the formal inclusion of Creative Arts in Ghana's curriculum, its implementation faces significant barriers in both public and private primary schools. Chronic underfunding, inadequate teacher preparation, and inconsistent policy support hinder effective classroom delivery and diminish the subject's status within holistic education frameworks.

This study investigates how primary school teachers in Ghana perceive and navigate the implementation of the Creative Arts curriculum amid these constraints. Through lesson observations and semi-structured interviews, it examines the instructional practices and coping strategies that teachers adopt, especially in under-resourced settings. By focusing on teacher perspectives, the research reveals how educators reconcile policy expectations with classroom realities. Ultimately, the study aims to inform curriculum reform, teacher training, and resource allocation strategies by providing actionable insights into making Creative Arts education more equitable, culturally relevant, and practically sustainable across Ghana and similar educational contexts.

This study aims to comprehensively investigate the implementation of the Standard-Based Creative Arts Curriculum at the primary school level by examining teachers' perceptions, experiences, and day-to-day classroom practices. Specifically, it explores how teachers understand and interpret the curriculum, how they translate its expectations into instructional activities, and the extent to which they feel prepared and supported in carrying it out. The study also seeks to identify the institutional, pedagogical, and resource-related challenges that teachers commonly face in the delivery of the curriculum, including constraints related to training, materials, administrative support, and classroom dynamics. Furthermore, it examines the coping mechanisms and instructional strategies teachers employ to navigate these challenges, highlighting the adaptive approaches they develop to ensure effective teaching and learning within the Creative Arts component. Together, these dimensions provide a holistic understanding of the realities surrounding curriculum implementation in primary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The implementation of standards-based curricula in primary education has significantly transformed teaching methods, particularly in creative disciplines like visual arts, drama, music, and dance. While these reforms aim for uniformity and measurable outcomes, teachers' experiences reveal a mix of enthusiasm and resistance, especially

regarding Creative Arts instruction. A recurring challenge across both global and Ghanaian contexts is the lack of teacher preparedness. Abban-Ainooson (2022) found that while teachers appreciate the goals of the standards-based approach, they are concerned about its rigid assessment frameworks, which restrict artistic freedom. Similarly, Mahama (2022) reported that many Ghanaian teachers viewed the curriculum as rushed and insufficiently localized, limiting its relevance to culturally rich art forms.

Ghana-specific research underscores that many teachers lack adequate training in arts pedagogy. Arthur & Obeng (2023) and Kwarteng (2024) highlight that even teachers with general pedagogical knowledge often lack subject-specific expertise in Creative Arts, leading to uneven implementation. This aligns with global findings by Deklu (2021), who notes that a disconnect exists between teacher training and the creative demands of arts instruction. These issues directly relate to the study's first research question, which seeks to understand how teachers perceive and experience the SBC implementation in classrooms. Beyond pedagogy, systemic constraints such as weak policy support, administrative neglect, and insufficient coordination exacerbate implementation difficulties. Asante et al. (2024) highlight Ghana's lack of institutional coherence, with poor monitoring and regional disparities in curriculum interpretation. Similarly, Boham (2023) and Lorenza (2021) observe that school leadership often deprioritizes arts in favor of STEM subjects, affecting commitment and resource allocation. These findings speak directly to the second research question regarding institutional and policy-level challenges.

Internationally, Richerme et al. (2012) categorize such issues into systemic, instructional, and material domains, emphasizing the need for multi-level intervention. These categorizations help contextualize Ghana's challenges within broader global patterns. Resource inadequacy remains a dominant theme, often mentioned in overlapping terms. Teachers face persistent shortages of basic materials like paint, paper, instruments, and costumes, especially in rural and peri-urban schools (Njoroge, 2019; Kwarteng, 2024). Asante et al. (2024) confirm that this limitation discourages hands-on learning and forces educators to default to theoretical instruction. Kuutol (2023) further notes that the lack of dedicated art rooms, coupled with limited instructional time, significantly reduces opportunities for meaningful practical engagement.

In response, teachers often resort to improvisation using recycled materials and self-funding supplies (Kwarteng, 2024). While this demonstrates adaptability, it also leads to burnout and unsustainable practices. These insights directly inform the third research question, which explores the coping strategies teachers adopt in resource-constrained environments. The Creative Arts curriculum's reliance on standardization frequently conflicts with culturally rooted forms of expression. Phillips (2017) notes that standardized curricula often neglect indigenous art forms, particularly in African and Asian contexts. In Ghana, where community traditions and local crafts play a vital educational role, this misalignment limits student engagement and diminishes teacher motivation. Additionally, the emotional toll of curriculum reform on teachers cannot be overlooked. Murphy (2020) found that teachers feel overwhelmed by the pressure to meet standardized benchmarks, often experiencing a clash between their creative identities and their roles as implementers of rigid frameworks.

The rigidity of learning outcomes presents yet another challenge. Quarshie et al. (2022) argue that prescriptive assessments in the arts undermine the flexibility needed for effective creative instruction. Teachers struggle to reconcile abstract, process-based art forms with outcome-driven evaluations a tension observed in both Ghanaian and international classrooms. The literature reviewed presents a multifaceted picture of the challenges in implementing a standard-based Creative Arts curriculum. These include inadequate teacher training, systemic policy gaps, material shortages, cultural misalignment, and emotional stress. While some themes are globally resonant, others such as the impact of local cultural traditions and Ghana-specific policy inconsistencies highlight the unique context of this study. By synthesizing these insights, the literature justifies the study's focus on understanding teacher experiences, identifying implementation barriers, and exploring context-driven coping strategies. It sets the stage for a qualitative inquiry that contributes not only to Ghanaian educational discourse but also to global conversations on curriculum reform in creative arts education.

METHOD

This study is rooted in the interpretivist research paradigm, which emphasises understanding human experiences and social realities from the perspectives of those involved (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2014). Interpretivism values subjective meanings, contextual interpretations, and the collaborative construction of knowledge between researchers and participants (Tarlak & Aryal, 2025). This makes it particularly suitable for exploring how primary school teachers in Ghana perceive and navigate the challenges of implementing the Standards-Based Creative Arts Curriculum (SBC). A qualitative research approach was utilised to uncover nuanced experiences, prioritising depth of understanding over numerical generalisation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study employed a multiple case study design, which is effective for examining complex phenomena across various educational settings (Yin, 2017). By engaging with both teachers and headteachers from selected public and private primary schools, the research aimed to gain comparative insights into the realities of curriculum implementation.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on individuals directly involved in SBC implementation. The sample consisted of six classroom teachers and two headteachers from six randomly chosen primary schools within the Tamale Metropolis and Sagnarigu Municipal. Participants varied in teaching experience, specialisation, and school type, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives. While the small sample size is typical in qualitative research, it limits generalizability and emphasises depth of analysis. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their experiences while the researcher probed specific themes (Vaivio, 2012). The interview protocol explored institutional support, pedagogical adaptation, resource availability, and teacher resilience. All interviews were conducted in a safe, familiar school environment, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

To ensure trustworthiness and methodological rigour, several strategies were implemented. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of interviews, observation checklists, and member checking, where participants reviewed their transcripts for

accuracy. Transferability was supported by providing detailed contextual descriptions of settings and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). Dependability was ensured through an audit trail that documented data collection and analytical procedures. Confirmability was reinforced by maintaining researcher reflexivity through memos and journals to acknowledge biases during interpretation.

Ethical standards were strictly followed. Approval was obtained from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Institutional Review Board (Ref. No.: HuSSREC/AP/181/VOL. 4), and permissions were secured from regional educational authorities. Participants provided informed consent, and their anonymity and confidentiality were protected using pseudonyms (BERA, 2018).

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006), guided the interpretation of the data. This process involved familiarisation with transcripts, coding, theme development, and iterative refinement. Thematic analysis enabled the identification of patterns across participant narratives while maintaining sensitivity to the emotional and contextual dimensions of their experiences. The resulting insights highlight the practical and institutional challenges teachers face and the strategies they adopt to effectively implement the creative arts curriculum.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the qualitative case study, exploring the challenges and coping strategies associated with the implementation of the Standard-Based Creative Arts Curriculum (SBC) in Ghanaian primary schools. The data were derived from interviews with headteachers and classroom teachers and are organized into two parts: (1) demographic characteristics of participants and (2) thematic analysis of challenges and mitigation strategies, aligned with the study's research questions.

Eight participants were purposively selected from six primary schools within the Tamale Metropolis and Sagnarigu Municipal. These comprised two male headteachers (HT01 and HT02) and six classroom teachers (T01–T07), the majority of whom were female (six out of eight). While both headteachers were from public schools, the classroom teachers represented both public and private institutions, with one participant (T05) from a private school. Among the six classroom teachers, five actively taught Creative Arts. Teaching experience among participants ranged widely from one month (T02) to over 20 years (T01 and T07) which provided a rich basis for comparative analysis of early-career and veteran teachers' experiences.

Despite this experience diversity, most participants lacked specialized training in Creative Arts education. Educational qualifications varied from diploma to bachelor's degree levels, with only one teacher (T01) holding a leadership rank (Assistant Director II) in the Ghana Education Service. While some participants had participated in professional learning activities, consistent opportunities for in-service training or curriculum-specific support were largely absent. These variations in background and experience served to contextualize their respective challenges and coping strategies in implementing the SBC. This was summarized and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants for the Interviews

Participant ID	Gender	School Type	Teaches Creative Arts	Class Level	Years of Teaching	Years in Current School	Highest Professional Qualification
HT01	Male	Public	No	N/A	1 year in role	1 year	Bachelor of Education
HT02	Male	Public	No	N/A	11 years in role	11 years	B.Ed (Mathematics)
T01	Female	Public	Yes	Basic 5	20+ years	5–6 years	Assistant Director II (AD2)
T02	Female	Public	Yes	KG1	1 month	1 month	Bachelor
T03	Female	Public	No	Basic 3	7 years	3 years	Diploma
T05	Female	Private	Yes	Basic 3	4 years	3 years	Diploma
T06	Female	Public	Yes	Basic 4	13 years	4 years	Bachelor
T07	Male	Public	Yes	Basic 1	15 years	15 years	Bachelor

The demographic data in Table 1 presents an overview of the teaching staff and leadership within public and private primary schools in Ghana. Among the eight participants, six are female and two are male, comprising two male headteachers (HT01 and HT02) from public schools and six classroom teachers, five of whom specialize in Creative Arts. Six participants are affiliated with public schools, while one represents a private institution (T05). This distribution offers a predominantly public sector perspective on the implementation of Creative Arts, with limited insights from private schools. The Creative Arts teachers exhibit a range of experience levels. T01 and T07 are the most seasoned, each possessing over 15 years of experience, whereas T02 is a novice with only one month of experience. This variation suggests diverse insights shaped by differing levels of professional maturity and exposure to the evolving curriculum.

Most participants hold bachelor's degrees, with one teacher (T06) holding a master's degree in education and another (T05) currently pursuing a bachelors degree while having a diploma. Notably, only one participant (T01) possesses a leadership qualification (Assistant Director II), indicating a higher administrative rank within the Ghana Education Service. The Creative Arts teachers teach students across class levels from KG1 (kindergarten) to Basic 5, encompassing both early childhood and lower primary education. This diversity facilitates a broader understanding of curriculum implementation across foundational learning stages. Most teachers responsible for Creative Arts instruction reported a lack of formal training specific to the subject. Only one headteacher indicated regular participation in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) or Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshops for ongoing professional development. The demographic profile revealed a teaching force that, while experienced, lacks specialized training in Creative Arts education.

Themes and subthemes from Interviews

The analysis of the interview transcripts concentrated on the challenges and mitigation strategies associated with the implementation of Creative Arts curriculum in primary schools. This process identified several themes and subthemes, which were refined

to enhance understanding of how teachers and students navigate these implementation challenges within their schools. These themes and subthemes were identified and presented as follows according to Headteachers and Classroom Teachers.

Findings from Headteachers' Interviews

Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed two overarching themes. These were Challenges in implementing the Creative Arts curriculum and strategies used to mitigate those challenges. Within each category, several subthemes emerged, grounded in participants' narratives and supported by direct quotations from the data.

Table 2. Themes and subthemes from Headteachers' Interviews

Themes	Subthemes
Challenges of Creative Arts Curriculum Implementation	Inadequate Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs) Lack of Dedicated Infrastructure Inadequate Funding Limited Teacher Preparation and Knowledge Time Constraints
Strategies to mitigate implementation challenges	Encouraging Improvisation Regular Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) Teacher Collaboration Leadership Initiatives and Future Planning Curriculum Scheduling and Time Management

Challenges of Creative Arts Curriculum Implementation as a theme captured participants' accounts of the challenges, they face in the schools in their efforts to implement Creative Arts standard-based curriculum in Ghana public and private primary schools. Strategies to mitigate implementations challenges was the second theme that gave accounts of participants' narration on how they (teachers) do to navigate these challenges. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts with headteachers revealed a range of context-specific strategies employed to address challenges in implementing the Creative Arts curriculum. These strategies were both reactive and proactive, reflecting the constraints of the educational environment in public primary schools in Ghana.

One primary strategy involved encouraging teachers to improvise with locally available materials to counter the lack of standardized art supplies and instruments. As one headteacher noted, *"We encourage the teachers to improvise... they can make use of what they have in their environment"* (HT02). This approach promotes resourcefulness and creativity among teachers, although it may compromise consistency and quality. Teacher collaboration and peer support through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) emerged as another vital strategy. Both headteachers emphasized that PLC sessions provide a platform for teachers to share ideas, troubleshoot implementation challenges, and build collective competence. One respondent explained, *"Teachers discuss among themselves... they have been equipped with the knowledge to teach during these PLC sessions"* (HT02).

In the absence of structured government support, internal collaboration among staff has also proven to be an effective workaround. Schools that lack materials or expertise in

Creative Arts are leveraging internal networks to pool resources and share responsibilities. A participant intimated that “*Teacher collaboration plays an important role... other teachers support with teaching, learning materials.*” (HT01). Another said, “*Teachers learn from one another... it helps them in addressing certain knowledge gaps.*” (HT02). Additionally, adjustments to time allocation on the school timetable were mentioned as necessary interventions. Given the practical and expressive nature of Creative Arts, both respondents emphasized that the current instructional time is insufficient. One stated, “*Creative arts is purely practical and requires more time... increasing the time space on the timetable will help*” (HT01).

While immediate interventions have been limited, school leaders expressed a commitment to future improvements, including the provision of teaching and learning materials, the solicitation of government support, and the expansion of CPD opportunities. These plans, though aspirational, suggest an awareness of the importance of Creative Arts in holistic education and a willingness to advocate for institutional change. One participant shared that, “*There are plans to provide adequate materials for effective implementation.*” (HT01). A participant (HT02) also suggested a dedicated “funding for creative arts” teaching and learning resources to improve effective learning.

Findings from Teachers’ Interviews

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed two overarching categories: (1) challenges in implementing the Creative Arts curriculum and (2) strategies used to mitigate those challenges. Within each category, several themes emerged, grounded in participants’ narratives and supported by direct quotations from the data.

Table 3. Themes and subthemes from Teachers’ Interviews

Themes	Subthemes
Challenges of Creative Arts Curriculum Implementation	Inadequate Teaching and Learning Resources (TLRs) Limited Professional Training and Specialization Curriculum Clarity and Structure Issues Inadequate Physical Space and Infrastructure Minimal Institutional and Community Support
Strategies to mitigate implementation challenges	Improvisation with Local and Recycled Materials Use of Group Work and Peer Collaboration Engaging with External Resource Persons Student-Centered Motivation Techniques Demonstrations and Visual Aids in the Absence of Materials

Challenges in Implementing the Creative Arts Curriculum

Implementing the Creative Arts Curriculum in primary schools presents a range of complex and interconnected challenges that influence the quality of teaching and learning. While the curriculum is designed to promote creativity, practical engagement, and holistic

development, its successful delivery depends heavily on the availability of supportive conditions within the school environment. Teachers often find themselves navigating structural limitations, pedagogical constraints, and contextual barriers that hinder the full realization of curriculum goals. One of the most prominent issues emerging from the literature and classroom realities is the inadequacy of teaching and learning resources, which significantly affects both instructional effectiveness and student engagement.

Inadequate Teaching and Learning Resources

One of the most pervasive challenges across all interviews was the lack of adequate teaching and learning materials. Teachers consistently reported that the absence of essential resources such as art supplies, costumes, musical instruments, and multimedia tools greatly hampered their ability to deliver practical and engaging Creative Arts lessons. As one teacher noted, “*Learning materials. Resources are not available*” (Teacher 02). Another described the improvisation required to compensate for this deficit: “*Sometimes we have to let the children bring some empty boxes... straws, empty bottles... to teach in our various classrooms*” (Teacher 01). The lack of these basic materials affected not only the quality of instruction but also limited students’ opportunities to explore their creative capacities, as they were unable to fully participate in hands-on activities, experiment with artistic techniques, or develop practical skills essential to the Creative Arts Curriculum.

Limited Professional Training and Specialization

Another significant theme was the lack of specialized training for Creative Arts instruction. Most teachers acknowledged that their formal education did not prepare them to effectively teach subjects such as drama, music, or visual arts. This lack of expertise led to feelings of inadequacy and frustration, particularly when addressing topics they were unfamiliar with. One teacher emphasized, “*If our stakeholders could help us with specialised... teachers who have been trained in this area, it would have helped*” (Teacher 01). Several participants explained that they often relied on their pre-vocational training or personal initiative, rather than on structured pedagogical knowledge or formal professional preparation, to deliver Creative Arts content. This reliance indicates a gap in targeted teacher training and highlights the need for more comprehensive instructional support to ensure effective curriculum implementation.

Curriculum Clarity and Structure Issues

Multiple participants expressed difficulties navigating the structure of the Creative Arts curriculum. They reported that it lacked detailed subtopics or a logical sequence, unlike other subjects with clearer curricular outlines. One teacher described it as follows: “*There’s no specific topics... you have to take the text and look for the topic you are supposed to teach*” (Teacher 06). This ambiguity made lesson planning difficult, especially for teachers with limited prior knowledge or experience in Creative Arts disciplines. Without clear guidelines on learning outcomes, appropriate instructional methods, or assessment standards, many teachers struggled to determine the scope, sequence, and depth of content to be taught. As a result, they often spent considerable time

attempting to interpret curriculum expectations, adapt materials, or design activities that aligned with the intended competencies efforts that were frequently constrained by their own uncertainties and the lack of structured support. This situation not only increased the cognitive burden on teachers but also contributed to inconsistencies in instructional quality across classrooms.

Inadequate Physical Space and Infrastructure

The lack of adequate physical space such as art rooms, studios, or designated performance areas emerged as a recurring challenge across the participating schools. This limitation was further compounded by large class sizes, which significantly restricted the scope and safety of practical engagement. As one participant lamented, “If there was space... it would have enhanced that activity... my class has about 65 pupils” (Teacher 01), illustrating the difficulty of facilitating meaningful hands-on activities in overcrowded environments. This concern was echoed by other teachers, some of whom described improvising with outdoor areas or rearranging classroom layouts to create temporary spaces for creative activities (Teacher 05). While these adaptations demonstrate teachers’ resilience and resourcefulness, they also highlight the structural constraints that impede the effective implementation of the Creative Arts Curriculum. The necessity for constant improvisation indicates that teachers are operating within environments that are fundamentally misaligned with the pedagogical requirements of arts-based learning, where adequate space, flexibility, and access to facilities are essential. Such limitations not only undermine the consistency and quality of instructional delivery but also reduce opportunities for students to engage in meaningful, sustained, and safely managed practical activities. Consequently, the curriculum’s intended emphasis on creativity, exploration, and hands-on engagement becomes difficult to achieve, reinforcing the urgent need for improved infrastructural investment and more supportive school environments that align with the demands of Creative Arts education.

Minimal Institutional and Community Support

The lack of adequate physical space such as art rooms, studios, or designated performance areas emerged as a recurring and significant challenge across the participating schools. In many cases, classrooms were not designed to support the spatial demands of the Creative Arts Curriculum, resulting in cramped environments that limited movement, collaboration, and the use of practical materials. This limitation was further compounded by large class sizes, which significantly restricted both the scope and safety of hands-on engagement. As one participant lamented, “If there was space... it would have enhanced that activity... my class has about 65 pupils” (Teacher 01), capturing the difficulty of facilitating meaningful experiential activities in environments that are overcrowded and physically restrictive. This concern was consistently echoed by other teachers, some of whom described having to improvise by conducting activities outdoors, utilizing verandas, or frequently rearranging classroom furniture to create temporary spaces for creative work (Teacher 05). Although these adaptive strategies reflect teachers’ notable resilience, creativity, and commitment to delivering the curriculum, they also underscore broader

structural constraints within the school system, including insufficient infrastructure, limited investment in arts facilities, and a lack of policy attention to the spatial needs of practical subjects. Ultimately, these conditions create an environment in which the effective implementation of the Creative Arts Curriculum becomes increasingly challenging, particularly for activities that rely heavily on physical interaction, movement, and tactile exploration.

Word Cloud on Creative Arts Curriculum Implementation Challenges

Word cloud was built on the challenges of the standard-based curriculum using the interview transcripts to present visualization of the challenges. The word cloud image encapsulates the challenges associated with implementing the Creative Arts curriculum in both public and private primary schools in Ghana. The prominent terms lack, materials, inadequate, training, space, and resources underscore the findings from teacher interviews, highlighting the systemic barriers teachers encounter.



Figure 1. Word Cloud on the Challenges of Standard-based curriculum implementation

The prevalence of the term *lack* (e.g., lack of materials, lack of training, lack of space) indicates a widespread and systemic deficiency in the provision of essential inputs for Creative Arts education. The frequent occurrence of the word *materials* further suggests that the unavailability of fundamental resources such as drawing tools, musical instruments, costumes, and visual aids constitutes a significant impediment to effective teaching and meaningful student engagement (Eisner, 2002; Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). Similarly, the term *inadequate* commonly appears alongside references to funding, resources, and institutional support, highlighting persistent shortcomings in the allocation and distribution of necessary provisions (Bamford, 2006). Collectively, these linguistic patterns point to a broader structural issue in which Creative Arts education is consistently under-resourced, resulting in compromised instructional quality, limited opportunities for practical exploration, and a curriculum that cannot be fully realized in everyday classroom practice (UNESCO, 2019). This trend underscores the urgent need for targeted investment, enhanced teacher training, and more deliberate policy attention to address the persistent gaps that undermine the successful implementation of the Creative Arts Curriculum (Kindler, 2010).

The term *training* underscores the necessity for both initial preparation and ongoing professional development in Creative Arts pedagogy. This deficiency in specialized training leaves teachers ill-equipped for technical disciplines such as music, drama, and visual arts. Terms like *space*, *overcrowded*, and *no art rooms* emphasize infrastructural limitations that obstruct practical lessons. The word cloud reveals challenges that extend beyond material and infrastructural concerns. Phrases such as *no support*, *community not involved*, and *no collaboration* indicate that implementation difficulties are exacerbated by insufficient stakeholder engagement, leaving teachers isolated in their efforts to adapt and deliver the curriculum effectively.

The insights gained from the word cloud have significant implications for educational policy and practice in Ghana. Firstly, the overwhelming presence of resource-related terms emphasizes the urgent need for the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders to prioritize resource allocation for Creative Arts. This includes not only the procurement of teaching and learning materials but also the provision of suitable spaces for practical engagement and performances. The prominence of training as a challenge points to a gap in both pre-service and in-service teacher education. Policies should therefore mandate structured training modules on Creative Arts education, ensuring that all teachers regardless of their specialization are equipped with the basic pedagogical competencies required to teach the subject. Regular workshops, peer learning through professional learning communities (PLCs), and mentorship programs can also be institutionalized to support ongoing teacher development.

Strategies to Mitigate Implementation Challenges

The major sub-themes that were identified in the analysis regarding the strategies that teachers employ to mitigate the implementation challenges have been presented in detail as follows. Before discussing these strategies, it is important to acknowledge that teachers often operate within highly constrained environments that require creativity, adaptability, and professional discretion. Despite limited resources, insufficient training, and structural barriers, many teachers demonstrate considerable ingenuity in finding ways to sustain instructional quality and maintain student engagement. The following sub-themes therefore illustrate not only the practical measures teachers adopt, but also the broader resilience and commitment that underpin their efforts to navigate the challenges associated with implementing the Creative Arts Curriculum.

Improvisation with Local and Recycled Materials

A prominent coping strategy employed by teachers was the use of improvised materials. Participants described creative ways to use locally available and recycled items such as plastic bottles, old clothes, straws, and spoons to replicate learning materials. As one teacher shared, "*We ask students to improvise those plain items... especially in the environment*" (*Teacher 05*). These efforts enabled teachers to offer some level of hands-on experience despite resource limitations. By creatively adapting available materials, repurposing everyday objects, or collaborating with colleagues and community members, teachers were able to design practical activities that, although modest in scale, still

provided students with opportunities to experiment, explore, and express their creativity. Such initiatives also helped maintain students' interest and participation, ensuring that the essence of the Creative Arts Curriculum was not entirely lost despite the absence of ideal conditions. Moreover, these adaptive practices demonstrate teachers' commitment to delivering meaningful learning experiences, underscoring their ability to navigate systemic constraints through innovation and professional dedication.

Use of Group Work and Peer Collaboration

Many teachers reported using group-based instruction to manage scarce resources and foster student collaboration. Through group work, teachers ensured that all learners had the opportunity to participate, even when materials were insufficient. One teacher described, "*Sometimes we put them in groups so that every child has a feeling of what is going on*" (Teacher 01). Another teacher emphasized the use of group-based instructional methods combined with child-centred supervision to sustain student engagement and ensure active participation throughout creative activities (Teacher 07).

Engaging with External Resource Persons

To supplement their knowledge and resources, some teachers collaborated with community members, local artists, or fellow teachers with specialized skills. For instance, a teacher recounted, "*I had to bring her here... an old lady who is into pottery... to teach the children how to mould a pot*" (Teacher 01). Such partnerships provided learners with valuable exposure to expertise not otherwise available in the school setting.

Student-Centered Motivation Techniques

Teachers also adopted motivational strategies tailored to student interests. These included allowing students to choose tasks aligned with their strengths, using peer examples for inspiration, and integrating play into lessons. As one participant noted, "*Sometimes we help them through their colleagues so that they help them in areas they have difficulties*" (Teacher 01). Another stated, "*Find out the child's best area and then engage him or her in that aspect*" (Teacher 05).

Demonstrations and Visual Aids in the Absence of Materials

When physical materials were unavailable, teachers relied heavily on demonstrations, illustrations in textbooks, and verbal explanations. Some teachers also mentioned the use of video evidence to enhance understanding of performance arts. For example, one teacher said, "*Video evidence of the processes involved in the performance of music, drama, and then the dance*" (Teacher 07). The findings of this study underscore the complex interplay of systemic, infrastructural, and pedagogical factors that hinder the effective implementation of the Creative Arts curriculum in Ghanaian primary schools. Despite the curriculum's potential to foster creativity, cultural awareness, and holistic development, its execution is compromised by fundamental issues such as inadequate teaching materials, limited teacher preparation, and infrastructural constraints.

Word Cloud on Creative Arts Strategies to Mitigate Implementation Challenges

Word cloud was built on the strategies that teachers employ to navigate the challenges of the standard-based curriculum implementation using the interview transcripts to present visualization for the strategies that teachers use to navigate the challenges. The word cloud visualization (See Figure 2) effectively illustrates the frequency and emphasis of specific strategies employed by teachers to address the challenges associated with implementing the Creative Arts curriculum in Ghanaian primary schools. Key terms such as improvisation, group work, demonstration, local materials, and collaboration underscore a strong reliance on adaptive, practical, and context-driven approaches amidst ongoing constraints such as resource scarcity, inadequate training, and limited infrastructure.



Figure 2. Word Cloud on the Strategies to mitigate challenges of Standard-based curriculum implementation

The prominence of “improvisation” suggests that teachers frequently leverage their creativity and resourcefulness to compensate for the absence of instructional materials. This notion is further supported by related terms like recycled materials, local materials, and environmental materials, which highlight teachers’ utilization of everyday objects to facilitate learning. These strategies reflect an emerging pedagogy of resilience, wherein teachers innovate to bridge the gap between curriculum expectations and classroom realities. Additionally, the term “group work” emphasizes the significance teachers place on collaborative learning. This strategy not only fosters equitable participation despite resource limitations but also encourages peer support and engagement. Related terms such as peer learning, co-teaching, and supervised group tasks reinforce this trend and indicate a shift toward more inclusive, student-centered instructional models.

The terms “demonstration” and visual aids prominently feature in this context, indicating that teachers compensate for the lack of hands-on materials by modeling tasks and utilizing visual representations. Similarly, terms like video demonstration and showing pictures suggest efforts to incorporate multimedia elements even in resource-constrained environments, recognizing the importance of visual learning, particularly in arts education. Notably, the inclusion of community support, external experts, local artists, and field trips indicates that teachers strive to extend the learning environment beyond the classroom. By

involving community members and professionals, teachers enhance students' cultural exposure and practical understanding of Creative Arts, despite systemic limitations.

The strategies in the word cloud highlight the urgent need for policy interventions that support teacher-led innovations. While improvisation and peer collaboration are effective temporary measures, they lack sustainability without institutional backing. Policies should prioritize providing low-cost, culturally relevant teaching materials, especially for under-resourced schools. Educational authorities can help by creating repositories of reusable resources or offering grants for locally sourced materials. Similarly, the emphasis on teacher involvement and co-teaching underscores the need for structured professional development. Ministries of Education and teacher training institutions should integrate arts-focused modules into both pre-service and in-service training programs. Promoting interdisciplinary teaching teams and establishing regular professional learning communities (PLCs) can enhance knowledge sharing and pedagogical support.

Consistent with Boham (2023) research, this study confirms that creative arts education within the SBC framework often faces institutional marginalisation. Although formally part of the curriculum, creative arts are deprioritised compared to subjects like mathematics and literacy. Teachers reported that school administrators typically allocate limited hours to the arts, a finding supported by Lorenza (2021), who emphasises the crucial role of school leadership in promoting or diminishing the arts. This conclusion highlights the urgent need for leadership training and policy enforcement to enhance the perceived value of creative arts.

The study also found that teachers face significant pedagogical challenges due to inadequate pre-service and in-service training in creative arts disciplines. Many respondents expressed a lack of confidence and content knowledge in music, drama, and visual arts, aligning with Kwarteng (2024) findings on similar deficiencies among early-grade teachers in Ghana. This undermines effective curriculum delivery and underscores the need for specialised professional development in creative arts education.

Resource constraints emerged as another key theme. Teachers reported chronic shortages of materials, including paint, musical instruments, costumes, and classroom space especially in rural and peri-urban schools. These results are similar to what Essuman (2022) found in the Effutu Municipality and back up (Asante et al., 2024) claim that having enough resources is crucial for successfully implementing the curriculum. Many teachers in this study used improvisation and local materials to address resource shortages, demonstrating adaptive behaviours similar to those described by Quarshie et al. (2022) in their exploration of blended pedagogies in arts instruction.

Another critical insight is the disconnect between curriculum design and classroom realities. While the SBC outlines competencies and learning outcomes for creative arts, teachers often perceive these as overly ambitious or misaligned with available resources and contextual needs. Abban-Ainooson (2022) similarly noted that many Ghanaian teachers feel the curriculum is not fully tailored to their teaching environments, particularly regarding assessment tools and learner diversity. This raises questions about how policy frameworks can be made more adaptable and contextually responsive.

Policy and Practice Implications

The findings of this study emphasise the urgent need for systemic reforms to improve the implementation of the Standard-Based Creative Arts Curriculum (SBC) in Ghanaian primary education. Teacher narratives indicate that while many educators display exceptional dedication and creativity, their efforts are frequently hindered by structural barriers such as limited funding, inadequate teaching materials, and insufficient institutional support (Asante et al., 2024; Kwarteng, 2024). A key implication for educational policy is the necessity to elevate the status of Creative Arts within school systems. Although it is included in the SBC, the subject often remains marginalised in scheduling and administrative priorities (Boham, 2023; Lorenza, 2021). To address this issue, policymakers particularly within the Ministry of Education and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) must develop and enforce clear policy guidelines. These should encompass the allocation of dedicated instructional time, systematic monitoring of curriculum implementation, and the integration of Creative Arts into national assessment frameworks, ensuring its equal importance alongside literacy and numeracy (Akyeampong, 2017; Asante et al., 2024; Mahama, 2022; UNESCO, 2019; Quarshie et al., 2022). Strengthening policy coherence in this manner is essential for promoting equitable access to quality Creative Arts education and ensuring that curriculum reforms translate into effective classroom practice.

Additionally, the study highlights a significant gap in teacher training at both the pre-service and in-service levels. Many teachers feel unprepared to teach the diverse components of the curriculum due to limited exposure to Creative Arts pedagogy during their formal training (Arthur & Obeng, 2023; Mahama, 2022). To rectify this, teacher education programs should include Creative Arts methods as a mandatory part of their curriculum, while in-service training should focus on hands-on workshops and collaborative teaching strategies. Establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) has proven effective, allowing teachers to leverage peer mentorship and shared experiences to improve their skills, as illustrated by teacher narratives (HT02, T07). These communities can facilitate the exchange of lesson plans, co-creation of materials, and collective problem-solving for curriculum-related challenges.

Resource inadequacy emerged as a recurring theme, with many schools especially in rural and peri-urban areas lacking basic supplies such as paint, musical instruments, and suitable classroom space (Njoroge, 2019; Kuutol, 2023). Teachers often resorted to improvisation, using local and recycled materials to support learning (T05). District education offices need to be empowered with the budgetary and logistical capabilities to provide these essential resources to schools. Community engagement should also be utilized to mobilize low-cost, culturally relevant materials and expertise. For example, one teacher shared that they invited a local potter to teach students about moulding techniques, providing authentic experiences not otherwise available (T01). These instances highlight the necessity for policy frameworks that encourage schools to collaborate with local artists and artisans.

The study further underscores the importance of integrating cultural relevance into curriculum delivery. Teachers frequently adapt standardised content to resonate with

students' lived experiences and community traditions, enhancing engagement and fostering identity formation (Phillips, 2017; Richerme et al., 2012). This process of localisation warrants greater institutional support, particularly through curriculum designs that intentionally embed indigenous art forms and cultural practices (Addo & Adu, 2022; Kusi, Asare, & Kquofi, 2023). Such alignment not only enriches learning experiences but also contributes to sustaining Ghana's diverse cultural heritage (Kilu & Sanda, 2025).

Taken together, the insights drawn from teacher practices and contextual realities highlight the critical need for coordinated, system-wide prioritisation of Creative Arts education within Ghana's basic school system. Strengthening this curriculum area requires not only sustained collaboration among curriculum developers, teacher education institutions, school leaders, and community actors, but also a coherent policy architecture that positions the arts as an essential component of foundational learning. When teachers are supported through robust pre-service preparation, ongoing professional development, equitable resourcing, and assessment frameworks that legitimise culturally responsive and arts-integrated pedagogies, Creative Arts instruction can more effectively nurture creative thinking, affirm cultural identity, and promote holistic development. Such an ecosystem enables the curriculum to function not merely as a set of prescribed competencies, but as a dynamic platform for cultivating learners' expressive capacities, socio-emotional wellbeing, and connection to Ghana's cultural heritage. Ultimately, sustained systemic investment in Creative Arts education offers a pathway toward more inclusive, culturally grounded, and future-ready learning experiences for all Ghanaian children.

CONCLUSION

This study illuminates the complex institutional and pedagogical conditions shaping the implementation of the Standard-Based Creative Arts Curriculum in Ghanaian primary schools and demonstrates how teachers navigate systemic constraints through adaptive, innovative, and culturally grounded practices. Despite persistent challenges including limited training opportunities, resource deficits, and inadequate structural support teachers continue to exercise significant agency by improvising with locally available materials, engaging in collaborative peer problem-solving, and localising curriculum content to enhance learner engagement. The findings collectively emphasise that strengthening Creative Arts education requires a deliberate and system-wide commitment to addressing structural inequities, improving the quality of pre-service and in-service preparation in arts pedagogy, and ensuring policy coherence that elevates the Creative Arts to a position of equal value within national educational priorities.

The study also highlights clear implications for future research and policy development. Expanding participant representation across diverse regions, adopting longitudinal and mixed-methods designs, and integrating insights from students, parents, curriculum developers, and district officials would yield a more comprehensive understanding of the curriculum implementation ecosystem and inform more inclusive and context-sensitive policy frameworks. Further exploration of locally grounded pedagogical models and community-supported resource systems could also generate scalable approaches to sustaining Creative Arts instruction. Taken together, the findings reinforce

the centrality of culturally responsive teaching, continuous professional development, and sustained systemic investment in Creative Arts education. By valuing teacher expertise, strengthening institutional support structures, and providing equitable access to pedagogical resources, Ghana's education system can more fully realise the transformative potential of Creative Arts to nurture creativity, affirm cultural identity, and promote holistic development among young learners.

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