

Reflective Analysis of the Ghanaian Upper Primary School Standards-Based Creative Arts Curriculum: Implications for Teacher Education and Training

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Abstract

The standards-based Creative Arts Curriculum was introduced in 2019 in all Ghanaian primary schools to promote critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and innovation among schoolchildren. However, studies suggest that the majority of primary school teachers in Ghanaian public schools are generalists, which presents challenges for the suave implementation of the curriculum. Some experts have recommended in-service training, while others propose art education top-up programmes for classroom teachers. It is important that any intervention strategies adopted are not only needs-based but also aligned with the curriculum that the teachers are expected to implement. This study explored the word frequency analytics tool in ATLAS.ti and Google Colab softwares to gain insight into the upper primary curriculum through critical reflection and deductive content analysis. The findings reveal that the curriculum is learner-centred, with the main goal of guiding learners through various pedagogies to produce artworks. Based on the analysis, deductive conclusions were drawn, recommendations were made, and practical implications were offered for policy and practice in teacher education and training for generalist in-service teachers. The paper concludes by discussing the limitations of the study and providing recommendations for further research.

Keywords

Creative Arts, Curriculum, Ghana Education, Reflective Analysis, Teacher Training

1. Introduction

After the formulation of the Ghana pre-tertiary education curriculum reform

framework, which emphasizes creativity as part of the four *Rs* (Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic, and cReativity), the standards-based curriculum for Ghanaian basic schools was developed for implementation (Quarshie et al., 2022; Swanzy-Impraim et al., 2023). The Ghana National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) states that the transition to a standards-based curriculum aims to provide comprehensive competency-based education for the “dream Ghanaian child” in order to foster global citizenship (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019a). In an article published in The Chronicle newspaper online, the former director of NaCCA reaffirms the quality of the standards-based curriculum, attributing its success to the diverse team of experts involved in its development (Armah, 2022).

Despite acknowledging the challenges in the implementation process, he emphasizes that these difficulties do not diminish the quality of the new curriculum. Numerous stakeholders, including teacher unions, politicians, media personalities, parents, teachers, and other individuals and groups, have also expressed concerns about the implementation of the standard-based curriculum. One prominent concern revolves around teacher competence. The standard-based curriculum introduces new subject content areas, some of which are integrated from the previous objective-based curriculum. The creative arts curriculum is one such addition. Consequently, there is increasing scrutiny, particularly from book publishers, parents, and classroom teachers, regarding the ability of in-service teachers to effectively implement the creative arts curriculum. Studies conducted in Ghana suggest that a majority of primary school teachers are generalists (Agyeman-Boafo, 2010; Opoku-Asare et al., 2015). Therefore, with the introduction and full implementation of the new standard-based curriculum, many generalist classroom teachers have expressed concerns and encountered challenges, particularly in relation to the newly introduced content areas such as creative arts (Quarshie 2023).

To support effective implementation of the revised curriculum, the Ghana Education Service (GES), in collaboration with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA), organized nationwide in-service orientation and training programmes to prepare classroom teachers. These programmes comprised workshops, seminars, classroom support, and subsequent continuous professional development through Professional Learning Communities, with the aim of strengthening teachers’ conceptual understanding of the curriculum and learner-centred pedagogical approaches (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019b). Notwithstanding the pre-implementation workshops, there is evidence that the classroom teachers, especially the generalists, still encounter various pedagogical challenges in implementing the creative arts curriculum (Agyeman-Boafo, 2010; Opoku-Asare et al., 2015; Quarshie et al., 2022). However, those who were trained as art teachers are doing their best to implement the curriculum with resource constraints (Quarshie 2023). As an art educator and a researcher, I find this phenomenon worrying, especially as the new curriculum has the potential to trans-

form learners into skilled and competent individuals for national development. However, one thing is clear that, it will take a longer time to train specialized creative arts teachers with both visual and performing arts competencies for the primary schools in Ghana. Alternatively, it could be viable to intensify the in-service training of the current classroom teachers while new teachers are trained. The effectiveness of such in-service training largely depends on intensifying the pedagogical competencies of the in-service teachers, which will be informed by the CAC document. It is this pragmatic reasoning that necessitated this study. With a keen focus on establishing the pedagogical direction of the CAC and the expectations of teachers, this study provides a reflective critical analysis of the CAC document and simplifies its entire content. Simplifying the curriculum will deepen its understanding and usability. Also, a clear understanding of the curriculum would help shape the focus of the type and quality of training deliverables to be modified by the experts to support the classroom teacher towards effective implementation of the CAC.

Therefore, guided by the need to strengthen teachers' understanding and implementation of the CAC, this study critically and contextually analyzed the curriculum document. Aligned with document analysis, the study was guided by two objectives. The first is to *examine the pedagogical directions embedded within the CAC for Ghanaian basic schools* and secondly *to identify the teacher competencies, instructional expectations and the implementation implications emerging from the curriculum requirements*. The analysis is intended to provide practical insights that can support curriculum interpretation, teacher preparation and professional development initiatives for the effective implementation of the CAC and future curriculum reviews (Quarshie, 2023).

2. Methodology

To assess the upper primary school curriculum, a reflective deductive analysis was conducted using an explorative design grounded in qualitative document review inquiry. The primary objective was to employ a content analysis approach to gain deductive insights from the curriculum document. Word frequency analysis was performed on the complete document of the upper primary (Basic 4-Basic 6) school creative arts curriculum, resulting in a word cloud that provided additional insights for critical reflection and deductive analysis. The word frequency analysis was employed because recurrent lexical items in policy and curriculum documents can provide useful indicators of dominant concepts, priorities, and areas of emphasis within the text (Soratto et al., 2020). In curriculum analysis, the frequency with which particular terms appear may help reveal underlying patterns and focal concerns that warrant further interpretation. However, lexical frequency alone does not establish pedagogical intent or curriculum priorities. Consequently, the word frequency outputs were not interpreted in isolation but were examined alongside a contextual reading of the curriculum document to ensure that the meanings, purposes, and educational implications of frequently occurring terms were

understood within their broader curricular context. This upper primary school Ghanaian curriculum was authored in 2019 by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) with the Ministry of Education (MoE). The analysis covered all sections of the document which has a total of 141 pages and is available online at the NaCCA website (Quarshie, 2023). The ATLAS.ti and Google Colab softwares, recommended for qualitative content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Soratto et al., 2020; Quarshie et al., 2026), was utilized for this purpose. Furthermore, the curriculum document was manually analyzed to identify its structural content and to draw comparative inferences from existing literature on the challenges of implementing a creative arts curriculum in Ghana. To gain an initial comprehensive understanding of the curriculum document, it was uploaded to the ATLAS.ti and Google Collab softwares sequentially, where tokenization was conducted. This allowed for further examination of the frequency table generated for advanced cleaning and exploration of the frequency feature to generate a word cloud for a more profound reflective analysis (Soratto et al., 2020).

Within the ATLAS.ti, the inclusion and exclusion functions were utilized to clean the text prior to conducting the word frequency analysis. The minimum threshold for inclusion in the frequency count was set as three occurrences and above. Excluded items comprised abbreviations, articles, punctuation marks, numbers, special characters and common stop words. Frequently occurring functional or connective words such as “*used*”, “*also*” and “*can*” were allowed not because they add much analytical value to the interpretations of the curriculum document but to demonstrate scope of coverage in the word count based on the minimum occurrences. The analysis process involved first importing the CAC document in Portable Document Format (PDF) uploaded onto the ATLAS.ti generating an initial word frequency report. Subsequently, stop-word parameters and exclusion criteria were applied after which the frequency analysis was re-run in Google Collab to comparatively validate the results and obtain meaningful representation of the curriculums’ dominant concepts and themes. The final stage involved exploring different visualizations options within both softwares. Word cloud and Treemap were settled on as they presented broader visual representation of the frequency reports, thereby enhancing the coherence and interpretability of the findings (Quarshie, 2023; Quarshie et al., 2026). Additionally, a manual examination of the curriculum’s structure was conducted to establish its design, content, and usability, enabling deductive inferences and implications for practice.

The deductive analysis was guided by the two objectives of the study as mentioned in the introduction. The curriculum document was read repeatedly and systematically, beginning with the preamble and proceeding through the learning domains, strands, sub-strands, content standards, indicators, exemplars, pedagogical guidelines, assessment expectations, and glossary. During the review, analytical notes were recorded on recurring concepts, instructional verbs, learner expectations, teacher roles, assessment practices, and curriculum implementation

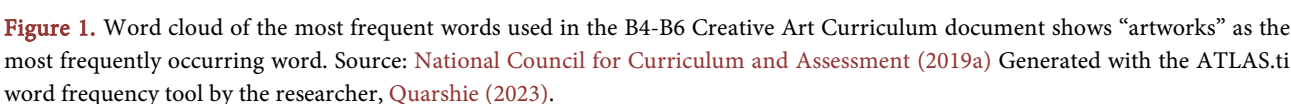


Figure 1 presents a word cloud visualization generated from the word frequency analysis of the Creative Arts Curriculum. The analysis identified “*art-works*” as the most dominant lexical item, appearing 421 times across the dataset, thereby signalling the centrality of artistic production within the curricular framework. Other recurrent terms, including “*learners*,” “*performances*,” “*visual*,” “*creativity*,” “*knowledge*,” “*understanding*,” and “*competencies*,” further reinforce the curriculum’s strong pedagogical orientation towards learner engagement, creative expression, experiential learning, and competency-based development. Deductively, the frequency and prominence of these terms suggest that the curriculum is intentionally structured to position learners not as passive recipients of content but as active creators, performers, interpreters, and meaning-makers within dynamic artistic and educational processes. Such lexical patterns reflect the philosophical underpinnings of contemporary standards-based educational reforms, which increasingly prioritize learner-centred pedagogies, creativity cultivation, critical engagement, practical competency acquisition, and the development of twenty-first-century skills required for participation in rapidly evolving social, cultural, and knowledge economies (Creely & Henriksen, 2025; Kerimbayev et al., 2023; Anwar, 2019).

These scholars highlight the importance of engaging learners in exploring their environments and creating artwork. Interestingly, the presence of the word “teacher” in the curriculum document was relatively less pronounced, appearing towards the lower bottom of the word cloud. It is therefore justifiable that the upper-primary school CAC of Ghana is consciously not teacher-centred but instead learner-centred. This interpretation is further supported by the curriculum’s repeated use of learner-focused exemplars and instructional statements beginning with phrases such as “*Learners are to...*” which direct attention to what learners should explore, create, perform, discuss, and demonstrate. Such formulations position learners as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of teacher-delivered content (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019a).

As mentioned earlier, the word frequency analysis reveals the word ‘*learners*’ as the second most frequently occurring word with 315 tokens. Deductively, I found that the emphasis on such dispositions projects the curriculum as progressive and strongly aligned with contemporary educational trends. Typically, in which case, learner-centred pedagogy continues to be widely advocated globally, particularly within developing-country contexts seeking to promote creativity, critical thinking, participation, and twenty-first-century competencies (Agormedah et al., 2022; Bremner et al., 2022; Sakata et al., 2022; You, 2019). Again, the word artwork as used in the CAC refers to compositions of both visual and performing arts. Learners are therefore expected to develop competencies in composing and staging their own performances and making visual artworks. The role of teachers has been delimited to facilitating this process for learners to develop these competencies through differentiated learning and assessment strategies and through the use

of technology. For example, the curriculum explicitly encourages the integration of technology into teaching and learning activities, with several exemplars requiring learners to watch videos, access digital resources, and engage with technology-supported creative processes. This emphasis reflects the curriculum's broader focus towards developing digital literacy alongside artistic competencies (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019a).

Given that the curriculum stresses the making of both visual and performing artworks, there is a need for teachers to consciously modify their lessons to reflect the focus of the curriculum. Teaching the CAC should primarily aim at fostering learners' ability to utilize creativity and critical thinking processes to create artwork, showcase their creations, and share their experiences through appreciation (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019a). Consequently, it is crucial for teachers to play their role in planning and delivering lessons that effectively engage learners in acquiring the requisite competencies, which predominantly involve the exploration of digital and manual tools, as well as interactions with their environment and peers as emphasized in the curriculum. To wit, teachers must avoid placing excessive emphasis on theoretical exercises, class assignments, and homework, as these do not align with the primary focus of the curriculum.

Again, the word frequency analysis also reveals the important use of “exhibition”, “display”, “demonstrate”, and “understanding”. During the reflective analysis, the findings reveal that these words are used frequently to describe some important competencies expected of learners. Whereas learners are required to create and perform their own creative compositions, the CAC requires that the creative process end with the display or exhibition of the artworks. Learners are also to demonstrate their understanding of the history and culture, environment, and topical issues through appreciation and appraisal of the artworks. The curriculum projects that learners develop appreciation, analytical, and communicative skills and competencies by engaging in these activities.

Further examination of the *treemap* visualization generated from the word frequency analysis provides additional proportional insight into the cognitive orientation of the CAC. Comparing the results from both the Google Colab and the ATLAS.ti the word “*knowledge*” emerged among the most frequently occurring terms, with 124 occurrences across the curriculum document (see second from right on the third row from both of the *treemap* in Figure 2). This finding suggests that the acquisition of content knowledge remains an important expectation within the curriculum. Interestingly, the term *understanding* appeared even more frequently, recording 166 occurrences and occupying the second column of the *treemap* (see Figure 2). The prominence of *understanding* over *knowledge* indicates that the curriculum extends beyond the mere acquisition or recall of information and places greater emphasis on learners' ability to interpret, explain, apply, and demonstrate meaning from what they learn. From a pedagogical perspective, this orientation suggests that teachers' classroom questioning, learning activ-

ities, and assessment practices should move beyond factual recall to promote conceptual understanding and meaningful engagement with artistic ideas, processes, and cultural contexts. Such expectations are consistent with competency-based and learner-centred approaches that seek to develop deeper learning and transferable skills among learners (Quarshie, 2023).

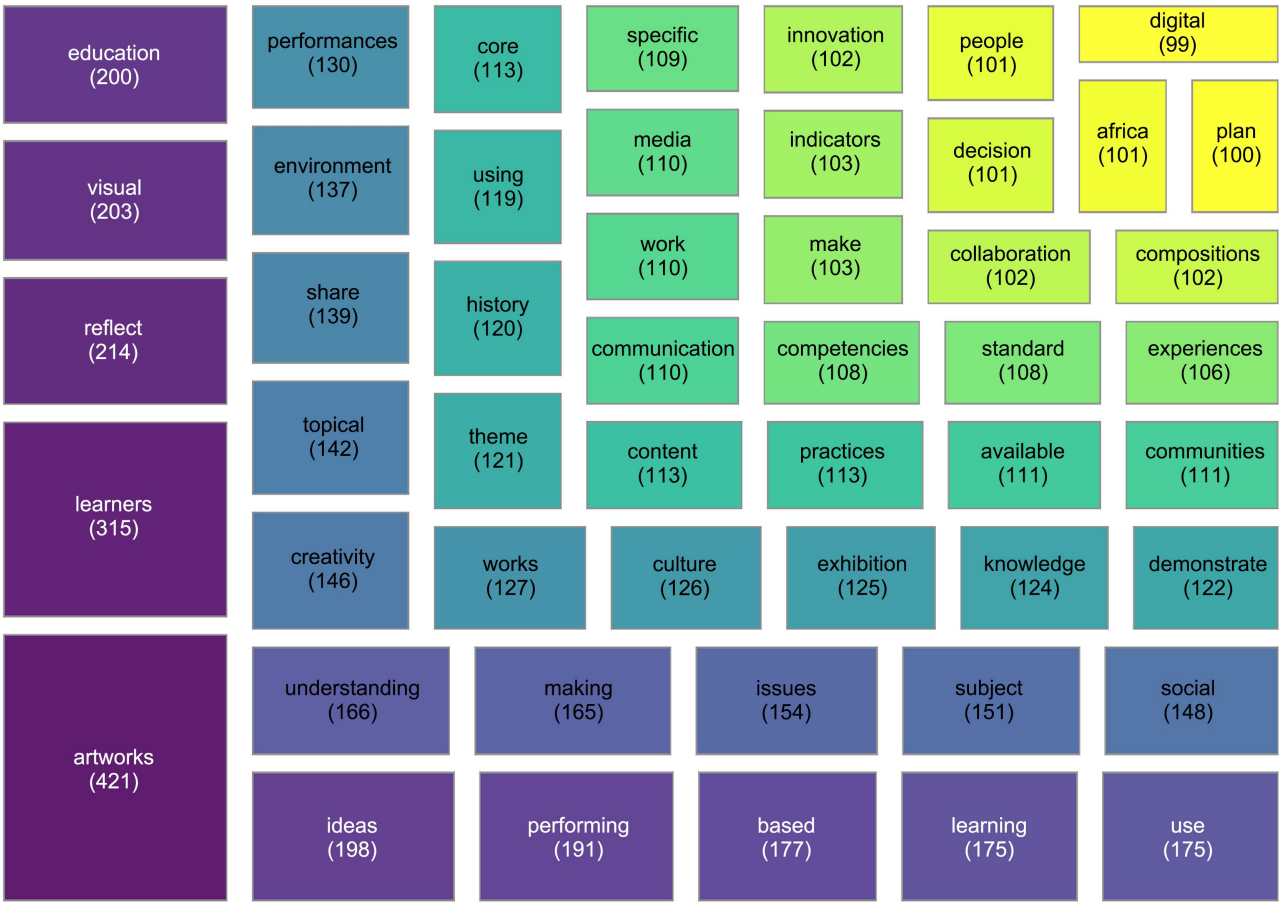


Figure 2. Treemap visualization showing the proportional frequency of top 50 words including the number of times *knowledge* and *understanding* appears in the CAC. Source: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2019a) Generated with python in Google Collab.

3.2. The Curriculum Structure

The second phase of the reflective review of the CAC focuses on the structural design of the document while delineating the impetus of the various sections of the curriculum document. The document begins with a preamble that explicitly outlines the rationale, philosophy for teaching and learning, aims, pedagogical approaches, and organizational structure of the curriculum, among other components. Focusing on the important spotlights, the study found that the organization of the curriculum sequentially provides guidelines and valuable information to make its implementation easy. For example, on page 21 of the curriculum (see Figure 3), the organizational structure of the document is explained with a diagram to help the user easily navigate the content. The explanation provided for

the strands, sub-strands, content standards, indicators, exemplars, and competencies expected of learners gives a clear direction on how to easily navigate the curriculum (Figure 3 and Figure 4). The guidelines are straight to the point and easy to understand. Given the explicit explanations and guides provided in the preamble of the curriculum, one could argue that even generalist teachers could, to some extent, plan and deliver their creative arts lessons successfully.

ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE CURRICULUM					
a) Organisation: The curriculum is organised under key headings.					
Strands are the broad areas/sections of the Creative Arts content to be studied.					
Sub-strands are the topics within each strand under which the content is organised.					
Content standard refers to the pre-determined level of knowledge, skill and/or attitude that a learner attains by a set stage of education.					
Indicator is a clear outcome or milestone that learners have to exhibit in each year to meet the content standard expectation. The indicators represent the minimum expected standard in a year.					
Exemplar – support and guidance which clearly explains the expected outcomes of an indicator and suggests what teaching and learning activities could take to support the facilitators/teachers in the delivery of the curriculum.					
	Sub-strand	Content Standard	Strands		Learning Indicator
No.	Sub-Strand	Content Standard	Strands		Learning Indicator
			Visual Arts	Performing Arts	
I	Thinking and Exploring with Ideas	CSI: Demonstrate understanding of how to generate own ideas for artistic expressions on the people based on their history and culture, the environment and topical local/national/global issues	BI 1.1.1 Visual Arts Think about the people who live in the local community and describe what you know about their history, visual artworks and their culture or way of life	BI 1.1.1 Performing Arts Think about the people who live in the local community and describe what you know about their history, performing artworks and their culture or way of life	

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Figure 3. An extract indicating the organization and structure of the Creative Art Curriculum. Source: Creative Art Curriculum, B4-B6 (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019a), Quarshie (2023).

In Figure 4, an example of the visual art content as organized in the curriculum is presented. Whereas the exemplars provided under the lesson indicators within the middle column are not cast in stone, they provide succinct and important details that generalist teachers can follow to deliver their lessons. Due to the learner-centeredness of the curriculum, the exemplars directly provide the behaviors, activities, and competencies expected of the learners. There are therefore several action or verbs used to describe the exemplars in the CAC. The most common of such verbs or phrases include study, identify, create, talk about, watch videos, listen to music, perform, experiment, explore, and examine. These action words or phrases often precede the phrase “Learners are to”, which indicates what teachers

are to guide learners to achieve. Also, the predominance of such action-based verbs suggest that the curriculum expects teachers to function primarily as facilitators of learning experiences rather than transmitters of knowledge. Instead of directing learners towards predetermined outcomes through didactic instruction, teachers are expected to guide exploration, support creative inquiry, scaffold artistic production, and facilitate reflection and appraisal activities embedded within the curriculum structure (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019a).

Strand I: Visual Arts		
Sub-Strand I: Thinking and Exploring Ideas		
CONTENT STANDARD	INDICATORS AND EXEMPLARS	SUBJECT SPECIFIC PRACTICES AND CORE COMPETENCIES
B4 I.I.I.I Demonstrate understanding of how to generate own ideas for artistic expressions about the people based on their history and culture, the environment and topical local/national/global issues	B4 I.I.I.I.1 Study and talk about visual artworks created by selected Ghanaian visual artists that reflect the history and culture of the people of Ghana Learners are to: - Study the visual artworks (e.g. wood carvings, printed fabrics, wall paintings, cartoons, posters, photographs, clay pots) created by some Ghanaian visual artists (such as Amon Kotei, Theodosia Okoh, Ablade Glover, Oku Ampofo, Offei-Nyako, Kwame Amoah, Betty Acquah, Kofi Antubam) by: - gathering information from library books; surfing the internet; visiting art studios, galleries, museums or exhibitions; - watching videos, films or observing photographs of artworks of some Ghanaian visual artists; - examining some artworks of the artists to find out how those artworks reflect the history and culture of the people of Ghana. For example, relate the colours and star in the Ghana Flag to the history of Ghana; - identifying and discussing symbols found in the artworks being studied that reflect the history and culture of the people of Ghana; - writing brief notes about one visual artist using the following guidelines: - Name - Training - Type of artworks - Title of some works.	Decision Making Problem Solving Creativity and Innovation Communication Collaboration Digital Literacy
	B4 I.I.I.I.2. Study and talk about visual artworks created by selected Ghanaian visual artists to generate ideas for designing and making own visual artworks Learners are to: - select an artwork of one of the visual artists studied; - think about the topic or purpose of that artwork. For example, flower pots/vases are made to hold flowers that decorate or beautify our surroundings; - examine the materials and production methods the artist used to design and make the selected visual artwork being studied. For example,	

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Figure 4. Structure of the Creative Art Curriculum showing content under the visual art strand Source: Creative Art Curriculum, B4-B6 (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019a), Quarshie (2023).

In addition to the sequential and scaffolding content details, the later part of the curriculum document provides a list of art terminologies. The goal of this glossary is to provide portable information on some technical words used in visual and performing arts to supplement the content knowledge of the teachers. The study also found this section very useful, especially for generalist teachers, as first-hand creative art reference material for effective teaching. In the analysis of CAC, I attempted to provide a succinct overview of the curriculum by simplifying the entire

document into a visual concept, as shown in **Figure 5**. The graphical abstract aims to visually represent the structural content of the curriculum. It presents a summary of the broad or major sections of the curriculum, focusing on the learning domains, competences, pedagogies, and assessment strategies essential for successful implementation. The diagram offers a concise visualization of the entire curriculum. The creative arts curriculum is a well-structured document that provides explicit guidance not only on the content scope but also on the pedagogical and assessment strategies and learner behavior management. The document also provides valuable information about the professional attitudes and competencies expected of creative art teachers while delineating the various types of creative learners to help teachers incorporate inclusive and differentiated pedagogies in their lesson preparation and delivery.

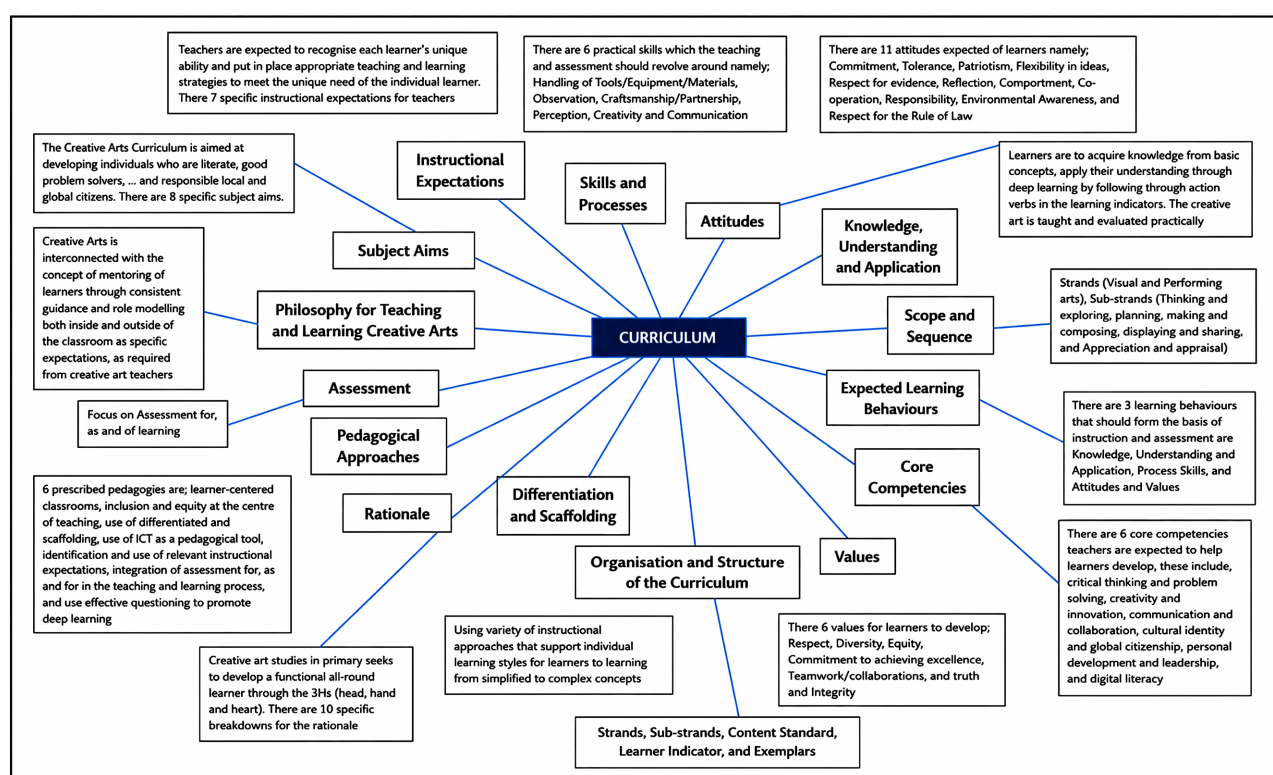


Figure 5. Graphical visualization of the entire CAC, highlighting its major sections. Researcher's construct, Source: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2019a), Quarshie (2023).

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

My reflective analysis of the CAC document establishes that the document provides detailed information on all components required for successful implementation by teachers. Guidelines on how to navigate the curriculum are provided in the preamble, as are the pedagogical, assessment, and behavioral modifications or competencies required of both teachers and learners. The focus of the curriculum is learner-centred, highlighting the use of technology to drive critical thinking, creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills in learners for responsible citi-

zenship, academic progression, and the world of work. Most importantly, the cardinal focus of the curriculum is that learners are to explore various techniques and materials, including digital resources, to produce artworks for exhibition, appreciation, and appraisal. It can be established that navigation through the CAC is easy and user-friendly, as there are prompts or guidelines provided. It is therefore recommended that college teachers training pre-service art teachers deliberately embed the study and analysis of the curriculum into their teaching. This will help student-teachers become familiar with the content and maximize their efficient use of it after graduation and practice as trained teachers.

Again, professional teacher organizations like the Art Teachers Association of Ghana should embed and discuss the curriculum document on their various platforms or in their meetings to increase the understanding of the usage of the document by generalist teachers. Again, teacher education training and service providers should consider directing their in-service training models for teachers to focus on helping generalist teachers effectively use the curriculum as the main reference material for the implementation of the CAC.

5. Contributions, Implications, Limitations, and Further Studies

5.1. Contributions and Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature as it is the first to analyze the content of the creative arts curriculum. Although ATLAS.ti and Google Colab softwares have been used for several content analyzes, this study is the first to explore this type of analysis on a curriculum document, thereby setting the pace for other scholars to follow. The approach to this study could be adopted by other scholars with similar interests in such qualitative textual analysis of policies, curricula, textbooks, or novels at different levels of education and practice.

In terms of praxis, the study provides insightful suggestions for the implementation of the creative arts curriculum. The organizational and structural content highlighted in this paper has the potential to serve as guidelines for curriculum developers and reviewers to consider in the future. Whereas this study presents invaluable insights into the fundamental reasons for which teachers should not neglect the curriculum in planning and delivering their lessons, the results of this paper provide an understanding of what should be given, especially to generalist in-service teachers. Also, this paper has the potential to guide the training of pre-service teachers studying primary education at colleges of education.

Teacher trainers can take advantage of this study as reference material to help train creative arts student teachers. Finally, this study could be of great benefit to national examination or assessment agencies like the West African Examination Council (WAEC), informing their focus on the assessment of the creative arts. Suggestions provided in this study include prospects for strengthening the quality of art education policies, teacher in-service training, and teaching and learning creative arts in Ghanaian schools, which can be replicated in other places.

5.2. Limitations and Further Studies

Whereas the study had only keen interest in analyzing the content of the upper primary curriculum to understand its direction and implications for creative arts teachers, a parallel comparative analysis of the Ghanaian curriculum and that of other African countries or developed countries could be insightful. This opens up further studies in that area. It will also be interesting to run a similar analysis for all the other standards-based curricula developed in Ghana to inform effective curriculum implementation.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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