

Examining pre-service teachers' journal reflection experiences during Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) in Ghana: Benefits and challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the experiences of pre-service teachers with reflective journaling while they were part of a Ghanaian university's Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) program. The objective was to evaluate the perceived advantages and challenges of reflective journaling and its impact on the professional development of pre-service teachers. The theories that guided this research are Schön's (1983) theory of reflective practice and Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle. Using cross-sectional descriptive survey design and multi-stage sampling, the researcher utilized self-administered questionnaires to gather quantitative data from 180 pre-service teachers out of a population of 312 pre-service teachers. Data was analysed using the Mean, Standard Deviation, Regression Analysis and Correlation Coefficients. The results show that reflective journaling enhances critical thinking abilities among pre-service teachers, promotes their capacity for self-reflection, and improves their overall professional development. The study highlights the value of reflective journaling for the professional development of pre-service teachers in Ghana. However, it also identified obstacles such as a lack of direction and time constraint, which can diminish its effectiveness. It is crucial to offer structured guidance, time for reflective activity, regular mentor feedback, and the efficient use of digital tools to support meaningful engagement in reflection, addressing these issues and optimizing the benefits of reflective practice in pre-service teacher education.

Keywords: Benefits and Challenges, Journal Reflection Experience, Pre-service Teachers, Supported Teaching in Schools

I. INTRODUCTION

The role of teachers is transformative, shaping the minds and future of students in the ever-evolving world of education (Yacek et al., 2020). Ghana is increasingly focusing on training pre-service teachers, a crucial step as the country strives to enhance the standard of education at all levels. This training is not just about imparting knowledge; it is about instilling a culture of reflection in teachers, helping them to evolve their professional identities and enhance their teaching skills through the power of reflective practices. Reflective journaling, a cornerstone of this process, empowers pre-service teachers to critically analyze their experiences, evaluate their teaching methods, and refine their instructional skills, inspiring them to become better educators (Cadiz, 2021).

Reflection by teachers is a crucial part of their professional development. Schön (1983) suggests that instructors should employ reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action to bridge the gap between what they learn in school and what they do in real life. Pre-service teachers can write about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings in a reflective diary. This documentation allows them to examine their teaching and that of their mentor teachers. This process of reflection enables them to understand better their role as teachers and how their teaching affects students' learning outcomes (Çimer et al., 2013). The education system in Ghana has faced numerous challenges, including an excessive number of pupils per teacher, insufficient resources, and a curriculum that often fails to meet the needs of children (World Bank, 2020). To better meet the needs of their students, teachers need to be able to reflect on their teaching methods and adjust their approaches. Reflective practices, such as maintaining a reflective journal, are instrumental in this process. They enable pre-service teachers to think critically about their time in the classroom and devise new approaches to solving the problems they encounter (Danday, 2023). In recent years, the Ghanaian education system has undergone significant changes, highlighting the importance of effective teacher training programs.

The Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) model is a beacon of hope in this transformation. Its mission is to equip pre-service teachers with practical experiences that complement their theoretical learning (Ministry of Education, 2021). This concept involves pre-service teachers immersing themselves in classrooms, engaging with students, observing teachers, and applying their knowledge in real-life situations. However, this transition from theory to practice can be daunting, which is why pre-service teachers need reflective techniques to bolster their confidence. Pre-service teachers document and reflect on their experiences in the Student Reflective Journal (SRJ) during STS, whether they

are observing school or classroom scenarios or practicing teaching. Reflective journaling bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and the real-life situations teachers face in the classroom. It helps pre-service teachers gain a deeper understanding of educational theories and how to apply them in real-life settings by encouraging them to write about their experiences (Boud et al., 2018). This reflective process is vital for developing the skills and attitudes necessary for effective teaching, such as adaptability, empathy, and critical thinking (Korthagen & Nuijten, 2022).

1.1 Statement of the problem

The quality of teacher preparation in Ghana remains a significant issue, despite the country's efforts to reform its education system. Although the country has improved its curriculum and teaching methods, many pre-service teachers struggle to apply what they learn in theory to practical teaching tactics. This gap between theory and practice is significant in early grades, upper primary, and junior high school education, where students acquire the basic skills, they need (Abedi, Prestridge, Geelan, & Hodge, 2024). Reflective journaling, with its potential to enable pre-service teachers to think critically about their experiences and gain a deeper understanding of their teaching practices, could be a valuable tool in addressing this problem (Larrivee, 2008).

However, there are several issues with incorporating reflective journaling into teacher preparation programs. Many pre-service teachers report feeling overwhelmed by the workload they face in school and on the job, which makes it challenging for them to find time to reflect regularly (Cadiz, 2021). A significant contributing factor to this challenge is the lack of clear guidance on how to practice reflective journaling effectively. This absence of structured support can result in shallow reflections that fail to support genuine professional development (O'Sullivan, 2021).

Additionally, Ghana's culture exacerbates the situation. Many teachers focus on hands-on teaching rather than reflective techniques. This method of teaching can make pre-service teachers less inclined to reflect deeply on their feelings and thoughts about teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2021). Not placing enough emphasis on reflection can make it harder for them to enhance their critical thinking abilities and adapt their teaching approaches to meet the needs of different students.

The research conducted so far has demonstrated the importance of reflective practice in teacher education. However, we still lack a clear understanding of how reflective journaling impacts the professional growth of pre-service teachers in Ghanaian schools (Mbage, 2025). Additionally, research has not thoroughly examined the link between what pre-service teachers perceive as the benefits of reflective journaling and their actual experiences. This highlights the urgent need for policy guidance to fill these gaps and ensure that we can base teacher education policies and practices on the most up-to-date and reliable information. Filling this gap will make sure that pre-service teachers are well-equipped to help students to learn.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. Assess the impact of perceived benefits of reflective journaling on the professional development of pre-service teachers.
- ii. Analyze how challenges faced during reflective journal writing affect its overall effectiveness among pre-service teachers.
- iii. Explore the relationship between the perceived benefits of reflective journaling and the journal reflection experiences of pre-service teachers.
- iv. Explore the relationship between perceived challenges faced during reflective journals and their overall effectiveness among pre-service teachers.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What is the impact of perceived benefits of reflective journaling for pre-service teachers?
- ii. How do challenges impact the effectiveness of reflective journal writing among pre-service teachers?
- iii. What is the relationship between perceived benefits and the journal reflection experience of pre-service teachers?
- iv. What is the relationship between the perceived challenges faced during reflective journaling and its overall effectiveness among pre-service teachers?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws primarily from Schön's (1983) theory of reflective practice, which emphasizes the importance of "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" for professional development. It emphasizes the role of intuition and tacit knowledge in the decision-making process. This framework suggests that pre-service teachers can enhance their teaching skills by reflecting on their experiences in real-time and

after the event, allowing them to adapt their strategies and improve their understanding of pedagogical practices (Larrivee, 2008). Additionally, the study considers Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle, which posits that learning is a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how reflective journaling contributes to the professional growth of pre-service teachers (Chan & Lee, 2021).

This article aligns well with the concepts of reflective practice and experiential learning, as it examines how reflective journaling can enhance pre-service teachers' professional skills during their Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) experience. The article utilises Schön's (1983) concepts of "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" to emphasize how pre-service teachers can reflect on their teaching experiences, both during and after their time in the classroom. Through reflective journaling, pre-service teachers can examine their work, which will help them become better teachers and gain a deeper understanding of their roles (Larrivee, 2008).

The article emphasises the continuous nature of Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle, demonstrating how reflective journaling is a constant companion in each step of this cycle. Pre-service teachers engage in a perpetual process of learning by observing and teaching in the classroom, documenting these experiences in their journals, reflecting on their insights, and applying new strategies in future teaching situations. This commitment to the learning cycle is both beneficial and essential for effective teaching, keeping teachers and pre-service teachers engaged and committed to reflective practice.

The paper aligns with the theoretical framework by examining the challenges pre-service teachers face with reflective journaling and discussing strategies to overcome them (Cadiz, 2021). This cultural and educational context adds a broader perspective to the study, enhancing our understanding of the use of reflective techniques in different settings.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Impact of Perceived Benefits of Reflective Journaling on the Professional Development of Pre-service Teachers

Reflective journaling is a valuable approach for pre-service teachers to enhance their skills (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024; Hojeij et al., 2021). It provides teachers with an organised way to reflect on their own experiences, become more self-aware, and develop the critical thinking skills necessary for effective teaching (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024). The benefits that pre-service teachers think reflective journaling will have on them directly affect their progress in many areas, including their teaching methods, classroom management, and overall professional identity. One of the primary benefits is that it encourages people to think more deeply about themselves. Pre-service teachers can utilize journaling to critically examine their teaching, identify areas of strength and areas for improvement, and gain a deeper understanding of their educational ideals (Cadiz, 2021). This method of self-evaluation is essential for continually improving, as it helps teachers ensure that their actions align with their teaching beliefs. For example, a study by Ashun et al. (2025) at Enchi College of Education in Ghana found that reflective journals helped pre-service teachers reflect on themselves more and facilitated their professional growth.

Reflective journaling also helps individuals enhance their critical thinking skills. Pre-service teachers learn to challenge their beliefs, consider alternative perspectives, and make informed decisions about teaching by reflecting on their classroom experiences and the impact they had on them (Spalding & Wilson, 2002). Being able to think critically is crucial for adapting to various learning contexts and meeting the unique needs of each student (Schendel, et al., 2020; Ocansey, et al., 1992). Almutawa and Alfahid's (2024) study in Kuwait also supports this finding by demonstrating that writing in a reflective journal enhances critical thinking. Reflective journaling is also a significant part of pre-service teachers' professional development, as it provides a platform for combining theory with practice and applying what they have learned in the classroom to reflect on their experiences (Hojeij et al., 2021). This type of experiential learning is crucial for developing practical teaching skills and increasing confidence in the classroom. Reflective journals can also reveal how a teacher's ideas, practices, and identity evolve, demonstrating their professional growth (Spalding & Wilson, 2002).

The National Education Policy (NEP) (2020) emphasises the importance of teachers being reflective, enabling them to improve their performance continually. Pre-service teachers can develop their critical thinking skills and reflect on their work through reflective journaling. Adding reflective journals to the teacher education curriculum can help bridge the gap between theory and practice. This addition will cultivate reflective practitioners who can contribute to the growth and improvement of the education system.

2.2.2 Challenges Faced During Reflective Journal Writing Affect Its Overall Effectiveness Among Pre-service Teachers

There are many well-known benefits of reflective journaling; however, several issues can also make it less effective for pre-service teachers. These problems often stem from a lack of understanding about the reflective process,

insufficient time, or difficulty articulating ideas and feelings. Overcoming these challenges is crucial if one wants to maximize the benefits of reflective journaling as a means to enhance one's skills. One significant problem is the lack of clear direction and training for reflective writing. Many pre-service teachers may not fully understand the purpose of reflective journaling or how to approach it in a relevant and effective manner. Journaling can become a shallow activity if we do not learn how to do it effectively. Instead of doing a critical analysis and self-assessment, we might write down what happened. Ashun et al. (2025) note that many student teachers in Ghana struggle to engage effectively with reflective journaling due to a lack of knowledge about it or a lack of proficiency in its use.

Time limitations are another significant issue that reduces the effectiveness of reflective journaling. Pre-service teachers often have a demanding workload, including attending classes, completing teaching practice, and other tasks, which makes it challenging for them to engage in deep reflection (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024; Hojeij et al., 2021). When journaling is done quickly or at the last minute, the quality of the reflection decreases, and the potential benefits also decline. Burton et al. (2025) suggest that writing a reflective journal is challenging for pre-service teachers due to their numerous responsibilities and busy teaching schedules. Another problem is that some pre-service teachers struggle to articulate their thoughts and feelings in writing. When we reflect, we sometimes have to deal with complex feelings, beliefs, and experiences that are difficult to articulate clearly and simply (Fook, 2007). This problem can make people angry and deter them from journaling, which in turn makes it less successful (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024).

Additionally, not receiving enough feedback and help can render reflective journaling less effective. Pre-service teachers may struggle to determine how to improve or gain a deeper understanding of their teaching techniques without constructive criticism and guidance from mentors and supervisors. Kuhn, et al., 2024 and Orland-Barak and Wang (2020) observed that specific mentors are not effective at teaching pre-service science teachers to be reflective practitioners because they lack sufficient training. To help address these problems, teacher education programs should teach reflective writing in a clear and structured manner, provide students with sufficient time to write in their journals, and offer pre-service teachers ongoing support and feedback. Teachers and educators can help pre-service teachers grow professionally through reflective journaling by mentoring and modelling it. Teacher educators can help pre-service teachers overcome these challenges and maximize the benefits of this valuable tool by making reflective journaling a safe and structured activity.

2.2.3 Relationship between Perceived Benefits of Reflective Journaling and the Journal Reflection Experiences of Pre-service Teachers

The link between what pre-service teachers perceive as the benefits of reflective journaling and their actual journaling practices is complex and multifaceted. How a pre-service teacher thinks about the importance and utility of reflective journaling can significantly impact their involvement in the activity and the depth of reflection (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024). On the other hand, writing reflective diaries can change and mould their first impressions (Hojeij et al., 2021). When pre-service teachers view reflective journaling as a valuable and important activity, they are more likely to invest time and effort (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024). More involvement can lead to more profound thoughts, more self-awareness, and a stronger dedication to professional advancement (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024; Lama, 2023). For instance, what if pre-service teachers believe that keeping a journal will help them improve their classroom management skills. In such a situation, they might be more eager to examine how they engage with students and devise ways to improve the classroom environment for studying (Ragawanti, 2014; Nduagbo & Casale, 2023).

However, if pre-service teachers view reflective journaling as a chore or something that does not matter, they may not be as enthusiastic about it, which could lead to superficial reflections and limited professional growth (Lama, 2023; Nduagbo & Casale, 2023). People may hold this unfavourable view because they do not understand why they should write in a diary, they lack sufficient time, or they have had negative experiences with reflective writing in the past (Hojeij et al., 2021). Writing reflective diaries can also change how a pre-service teacher perceives their benefits (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024). Learning new things about their teaching and receiving helpful comments from mentors makes them think that journaling is more valuable, which encourages them to continue doing it (Lama, 2023). On the other hand, bad experiences, including having trouble putting their thoughts into words or feeling overwhelmed by the reflective process, can make them think less of its benefits and cause them to lose interest (Branch & Paranjape, 2002; Hojeij et al., 2021).

Additionally, the discrepancy between what pre-service teachers expect to happen and what occurs when they engage in reflective journaling can impact their motivation and engagement (Lama, 2023; Kılıç, 2022). A teacher may stop journaling if they think it will help them become more self-aware, but it does not work out that way (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024). Therefore, teacher education programs must ensure that the benefits of reflective journaling that people perceive as accurate align with the actual experiences of pre-service teachers (Barham, 2023; Faculty Focus, n.d.).

2.2.4 Relationship Between Perceived Challenges Faced During Reflective Journal and Its Overall Effectiveness among Pre-Service Teachers

There is a complex relationship between the perceived difficulty of reflective journaling for pre-service teachers and its effectiveness for them. As future teachers, how pre-service teachers think about the problems associated with journaling can significantly impact their engagement and effectiveness in this practice (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024). If pre-service teachers believe these problems are manageable, they may be more likely to persevere, which can help them grow professionally. For instance, let us say a pre-service teacher views time limits as a temporary problem. In that instance, they might develop ways to incorporate journaling into their daily lives, which would help them think more deeply about their teaching (Coleman et al., 2023).

However, if pre-service teachers perceive reflective journaling as too challenging due to difficulties, they may be less inclined to engage in it (Spiteri, 2024). This feeling can be caused by factors such as unclear instructions or inadequate feedback. If teachers do not address these problems, pre-service teachers may lose interest and view them as drawbacks rather than benefits (Coleman et al., 2023). A study in Kuwait found that time constraints and classroom management issues can obscure the benefits of reflective journaling (Almutawa & Alfahid, 2024).

Additionally, people's perceptions of journaling's usefulness can change depending on how they have dealt with these problems. People may think more highly of it if they can handle problems and learn from them. On the other hand, frequent problems may lead people to doubt its effectiveness (Vosniadou, et al., 2020). Ultimately, maintaining motivation hinges on the balance between perceived hurdles and actual outcomes. Pre-service teachers may become disheartened if they believe that problems are hindering their effectiveness without seeing any improvement (EEF blog, 2022). Because of this, teacher education programs should provide pre-service teachers with the necessary aid and resources to address these issues. This provision will make reflective journaling more useful for them as they work towards becoming teachers (Dorsah, et al., 2022). By addressing these problems directly, we can help pre-service teachers develop the critical thinking and reflection skills essential for effective teaching (Coleman et al., 2023).

III. METHODOLOGY

Using a cross-sectional descriptive survey approach, the study examined the benefits and challenges of journal reflection experience of pre-service teachers during their Supported Teaching in School (STS) at a public university in Ghana. The survey design aimed to explore the benefits and challenges of pre-service teachers' journal reflection experiences during their STS. The main goal of this study design is to describe a phenomenon. To determine the benefits and challenges of pre-service teachers' journal reflection experiences, a survey questionnaire was developed and distributed.

All pre-service teachers enrolled in the three basic education specialisms in the Ghanaian public university were part of the study's target population. For the 2024–2025 academic year, the study's accessible population comprises 312 pre-service teachers enrolled in the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) program's junior high school specialisation, upper primary specialisation, and early grade specialisation programs. The sample size consisted of 180 responders from the three programs at Levels 200–400. Pre-service teachers from this public university, enrolled in the three programs, were given a survey questionnaire that was created, developed, and distributed.

Section A elicited data and background information from the respondents. Personal data, including age, level, program of study, gender, religious affiliation, and residential status, had to be entered by the students. Thirty-seven statements regarding the subject matter of student teachers' journal entries are also included in Section B. Twelve statements regarding the different kinds of reflection they do are also included in Section C. Eight statements about the advantages of reflective practice are also included in Section D, wherein the veracity of the statements regarding journal entries and reflections in connection with the advantages is indicated. Additionally, there are five statements about the difficulties of writing a reflective journal in section E. Regarding journal entries and reflections on for sections B – E, students were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to each item. For each item both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires.

To summarize the data, descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were computed. With a significance level set at $p < 0.05$, inferential statistics—more especially, regression analysis—were used to investigate relationships between variables and compare groups (Pallant, 2013). To ascertain whether the questionnaire successfully met the study objectives, the researchers conducted a face validity test (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). To test the questionnaire, I asked some experts who had previously conducted journal reflection research to review the items, taking the study's objectives into account. After the examination, the panel validated the instrument. To ensure the questionnaire was reliable for collecting data, we piloted it with 50 aspiring teachers selected at random from a different Ghanaian teacher-training university. The questionnaire also passed the reliability test, as its Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.77, which exceeded the 0.7 cutoff point established by McMillan & Schumacher (2010). These actions enhanced the legitimacy and dependability of the findings.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Background Information

The study sought the following details about the respondents: age, gender, level, religious affiliation, programmes of study, residential status, and GPA. Table 1 displays the results of the responses regarding the demographic distribution. The researcher distributed survey questionnaires to undergraduate pre-service teachers taking part in reflective journaling, with a response rate of 58 %.

Table 1
Demographic Variables

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Below 20 years	62	34.4
21 - 25 years	118	65.6
Total	180	100
Gender		
Male	87	48.3
Female	93	51.7
Total	180	100
Programme of Study		
B. Ed. Early Grade Specialism	29	16.1
B. Ed. Upper Primary Specialism	57	31.7
B. Ed. Junior High School Specialism	94	52.2
Total	180	100
Level		
200	52	28.9
300	93	51.7
400	35	19.4
Total	180	100
Religious Denomination		
Christianity	166	92.2
Islam	14	7.8
Total	180	100
Residential Status		
Resident	54	30
Non-Resident	126	70
Total	180	100
Grade Point Average (GPA)		
Below 2.00	4	2.2
2.00 – 2.99	59	32.8
3.00 – 3.59	83	46.1
3.60 – 4.00	34	18.9
Total	180	100

The information in Table 1 provides an overview of a varied student body. Many students are between the ages of 21 and 25 (65.6%), with a slight majority of females (51.7%). The B.Ed. Junior High School Specialisation attracts the most significant number of students (52.2%). Christians make up a sizable majority of the student population (92.2%), whereas many of the pre-service teachers prefer living off campus (70.0%). A small percentage of students struggle with GPAs below 2.00 (2.2%), indicating possible areas for academic intervention, even though many students achieve GPAs between 2.00 and 3.59 (46.1%).

4.1.1 Influence of Perceived Benefits of Reflective Journaling on the Professional Development of Pre-Service Teachers

This objective investigates the impact of perceived benefits of reflective journaling on the professional development of pre-service teachers. To quantify these benefits, the mean and standard deviation of various perceived advantages were calculated, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2*Benefits of Reflective Practice*

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
It helps to develop critical thinking skills	4.22	.764
It helps to review the learning materials learned	4.19	.748
It contributes to deepening understanding and knowledge	4.21	.691
It trains to practice self-reflection	4.17	.729
The task is an effective technique in encouraging trainees to think about their teaching situations	4.13	.693
It guides us to think about future professional development needed	4.22	.757
It helps pre-service teachers develop their repertoire of teaching skills	4.14	.775
It helps pre-service teachers survive the beginning year of teaching	4.04	.824
Average Mean	4.17	
Average Standard Deviation		1.67

With a mean score of 4.22 ($SD = 0.764$), the data shows that the most important perceived benefit of reflective journaling is its ability to foster critical thinking abilities. According to this research, pre-service teachers are aware of the importance of thinking skills in their professional growth. Its beneficial effects on educational outcomes are that reflective journaling assists in the review of learned materials ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.748$) and deepens understanding ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.691$). The pre-service teachers' overall perception of the benefits of reflective journaling, as indicated by their average mean score of 4.17, suggests that they view it as highly beneficial for their professional development. Consistent scores across various benefits emphasize a shared understanding of the value of reflective practices in fostering critical thinking, introspection, and the development of teaching skills. This optimistic viewpoint supports the notion that incorporating reflective journaling into teacher preparation programs can enhance the preparedness and effectiveness of aspiring teachers.

4.1.2 Examining the Impact of Writing Difficulties on Pre-Service Teachers' Overall Efficacy in Reflective Journaling

This goal examines how the difficulties pre-service teachers face when writing reflective journals impact their overall efficacy. The researcher calculated the mean and standard deviation of several factors to evaluate these difficulties, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3*Challenges of Writing Reflective Journal*

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
It takes time to engage in journal writing and reflection every week	3.98	0.787
Lack of explicit instruction on the journal writing and reflection task	3.78	1.026
Lack/inadequate feedback from Supervisors	3.82	1.116
It is easy to write the issues in the journal but difficult to reflect on them	3.62	1.042
Average Mean	3.8	
Average Standard Deviation		0.993

A moderate assessment of the difficulties encountered when writing reflectively in a journal is indicated by the average mean score of 3.80. With a mean score of 3.98 ($SD = 0.787$), the time needed for weekly journal writing and reflection is the biggest worry. According to this research, pre-service teachers believe that time constraints hinder their ability to engage fully in the reflective process. Other significant issues affecting the efficacy of reflective journaling include the absence of explicit instructions on the journaling task ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.026$) and insufficient supervisor feedback ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.116$). Additionally, the difficulty in moving from merely writing about issues to reflecting on them ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.042$) is a gap in the reflective practice process.

The researcher investigated the effect of specific difficulties on the overall efficacy of reflective journaling among pre-service teachers using the regression analysis presented in Table 4. With a p-value of 0.014, the regression analysis shows a statistically significant correlation between the difficulties encountered in reflective journaling and perceived effectiveness. The unstandardised coefficient for perceived effectiveness is 0.078, meaning that the difficulties encountered rise in proportion to each unit increase in perceived effectiveness.

Table 4

Regression Analysis to Determine the Impact of Specific Challenges on the Overall Effectiveness of Reflective Journaling

		Coefficients			t	Sig.
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	9.169	1.348		6.799	.000
	perceived_effectiveness	.078	.031	.183	2.484	.014

a. Dependent Variable: Challenges

When perceived effectiveness is zero, the constant term of 9.169 indicates the baseline level of difficulties. The moderate effect of perceived effectiveness on the difficulties encountered is indicated by the positive standardised coefficient (Beta = 0.183), which implies that pre-service teachers may identify more difficulties as they believe their reflective journaling is more effective. This suggests that with the right strategies and support, there is potential for growth and improvement in reflective journaling.

4.1.3 Relationship between Pre-Service Teachers' Journal Reflection Experiences and Their Perceptions of the Benefits of Reflective Journaling

This goal investigates the connection between pre-service teachers' experiences with journal reflection and their perceptions of the benefits of reflective journaling. Table 5 displays the correlation coefficients, which provide insight into the direction and strength of this relationship.

Table 5

Regression Analysis Correlation Coefficients to Explore the Strength and Direction of the Relationship between Perceived Benefits and Journal Reflection Experiences.

		Correlations	
		Perceived_Benefit	Journal_Reflection_Experience
Perceived_Benefit	Pearson Correlation	1	.466**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	180	180
Journal_ReflectionExperience	Pearson Correlation	.466**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	180	180

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis reveals a moderate positive relationship between the perceived benefits of reflective journaling and journal reflection experiences, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.466. This correlation suggests that pre-service teachers' reflection experiences improve as they see more benefits from reflective journaling. The significance level of 0.000 indicates that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, meaning it is doubtful that the relationship is merely coincidental. The results from a sample of 180 strongly suggest that making the benefits of reflective journaling clearer can lead to more meaningful reflection experiences for pre-service teachers.

4.1.4 Effect of Perceived Difficulties in Maintaining Reflective Journals on Their Overall Utility for Pre-Service Teachers

This objective examines how the perceived difficulties of reflective journaling impact its effectiveness for pre-service teachers. Table 6 shows a summary of the correlation coefficients. The correlation analysis reveals a weak positive relationship between reported challenges and perceived effectiveness, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.183. This finding suggests that as pre-service teachers find reflective journaling to be more challenging, they perceive it to be more effective.

Table 6*Correlation Coefficients to Assess the Relationship Between Reported Challenges and Perceived Effectiveness.*

Correlation Coefficient			
		Challenges	Perceived_effectiveness
Challenges	Pearson Correlation	1	.183*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.014
	N	180	180
Perceived_effectiveness	Pearson Correlation	.183*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	
	N	180	180

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The fact that the significance level is 0.014 indicates that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, meaning it is unlikely to be due to chance. With a sample size of 180, discussing the problems that arise when writing a reflective journal could make it seem more useful to pre-service teachers.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Impact of Perceived Benefits of Reflective Journaling on Professional Development

The results indicate that pre-service teachers perceive reflective journaling as a valuable tool for their professional development, particularly in enhancing their critical thinking skills (mean score = 4.22). This result aligns with findings from other researchers, such as Moon (2013), who emphasizes the importance of critical thinking in teacher training. The pre-service teachers' average mean score of 4.165 on a variety of benefits supports the idea that reflective practices help develop important skills. This observation aligns with Harrison and Lee's (2020) assertion that reflective journaling helps teachers prepare for their roles.

Some research suggests that the perceived benefits of reflective journaling may vary across different school settings (Kreber, 2019). Although our results show a consistent positive view, it is essential to note that not all research agrees on whether these benefits are the same across different teacher education settings.

4.2.2 Challenges Faced During Reflective Journal Writing

The analysis reveals that reflective journaling has several significant issues, the most notable of which is insufficient time (mean score = 3.98). This finding aligns with Spiker's (2014) observation that difficulties in time management can hinder one's ability to think clearly. Chan and Lee (2021) argue that challenges can be opportunities for growth if we handle them properly. This finding differs from our previous findings, which indicated that challenges mostly hurt engagement.

The regression analysis also reveals a statistically significant relationship between the perceived effectiveness of individuals and the challenges they encounter. This result aligns with Miller (2019), who emphasizes the importance of recognizing these challenges in the reflective process. However, our results do not align with those of other studies, which suggest that challenges do not always directly impact on how effective people perceive them to be. This assertion means that pre-service teachers may not always connect the challenges they face with their perceptions of their effectiveness.

4.2.3 Relationship Between Perceived Benefits and Journal Reflection Experiences

The correlation analysis reveals a moderate positive relationship (Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.466) between how pre-service teachers perceive reflective journaling as beneficial and its actual effectiveness in helping them. This result supports what Ghaye and Ghaye (2010) suggest: that understanding the benefits of reflective practices leads to increased engagement. The strong correlation ($p = 0.000$) suggests a significant relationship, which supports the idea that positive perceptions lead to more profound reflections, in line with findings from other studies.

However, some studies suggest that the link between perceived benefits and actual experiences may not be as strong in certain situations (Taylor & Francis Online, 2021). Our results support the idea that perceived benefits enhance reflection experiences. However, they also suggest that contextual factors may play a role in this relationship, highlighting areas that require further research.

4.2.4 Relationship Between Perceived Challenges and Overall Effectiveness

The results show a weak positive relationship (Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.183) between the perceived difficulty of reflective journaling and its overall effectiveness. This finding suggests that while more difficult challenges make pre-service teachers feel more effective, the connection is not strong. This result is consistent with Bashan and

Holsblat (2017) findings, which also show similar results, indicating that the connection is complicated and influenced by several factors.

However, other studies suggest that challenges can lead to a loss of interest if they are not appropriately handled (EEF blog, 2022). Our findings support the notion that addressing problems can make people feel more effective. On the other hand, they also demonstrate the importance of teacher education programs having better support systems, which contrasts with some research that downplays the significance of these issues.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate the importance of reflective journaling for the professional growth of pre-service teachers in Ghana. The perceived benefits, including the enhancement of critical thinking and self-reflection, underscore the importance of incorporating reflective practice into teacher education. We need to make reflective journaling as helpful as possible; however, the problems that pre-service teachers face, such as insufficient time and inadequate support, need to be addressed. Teacher education programs can improve the experience of pre-service teachers during STS by understanding these dynamics, which will help them become more reflective practitioners.

5.2 Recommendations

Teacher education programs should give structured guidance by providing clear instructions and training on reflective journaling. This support will help pre-service teachers maximize the benefits of the process. Schools should allocate time in the curriculum for reflective journaling to help pre-service teachers who are short on time and to encourage their greater involvement. Additionally, mentors and supervisors should provide pre-service teachers with regular feedback to support their reflective practices and identify areas for improvement. It is essential to emphasize the importance of reflection in professional development by encouraging teachers and pre-service teachers to engage in it. Finally, using digital tools and platforms for journaling can make it easier for pre-service teachers to access and engage with their journals.

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