

Research Article

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Assessing the impacts of students' reflective journals on the professional development of student-teachers in Enchi College of Education

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Abstract: The study examined students' understanding of the Students' Reflective Journal (SRJ), student-teachers' responses to the SRJ, and its impact on professional development. A quantitative approach was employed in the study. Specifically, the descriptive survey design was employed. The study was conducted at Enchi College of Education and 24 partner public basic schools in the Aowin Municipality, Western North Region, Ghana. The sampling procedure consisted of the following steps: the census approach was employed to engage 30 College Tutors, including Supported Teaching in Schools Coordinators (STCs), while stratified sampling was used to select 77 Mentors and 325 Student-Teachers. This gave a sample size of 432 respondents for the study. The main instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire. The content validity was determined by seeking expert judgment from specialists, while the instrument's reliability was ascertained using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The results indicated that the SRJ enhanced self-reflection and improved professional growth, supported collaborative learning, and facilitated lifelong learning. However, they struggled with providing accurate responses. The study recommended that workshops should be conducted to clearly define and emphasise the roles of tutors and mentors in STS activities.

Keywords – Professional development, Student Reflective Journal (SRJ), Supported Teaching, Teaching Practice

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Stevens and Cooper (2009), a reflective journal is a chronological, dated account of events and ideas that includes the writer's responses and reflections on those events and ideas. This is a means of recording a student's ideas, personal thoughts, experiences, reflections, and insights throughout the learning process. Individual recordings of students' educational experiences are kept in reflective journals. A reflective journal requires the students to think more deeply, challenge their old ideas with new information, synthesise the course materials they have learnt into their thoughts and philosophy, and finally integrate it into their daily experiences for future actions.

Completing a Student Reflective Journal (SRJ) has been acknowledged as a powerful educational tool for developing students' capacity for lifetime learning. Kerka (1996) points out that journal writing is critical to knowledge processing, helping learners articulate connections between new information and what they already know. This technique allows students to enhance their learning by thinking and reflecting on what they have learnt. According to Borko (2004), teachers' professional development is crucial for advancing their subject-matter expertise and instructional pedagogies and affecting teacher attitudes and beliefs. Researchers such as Opfer and Peder (2011) and Kazemi and Hubbard (2008) have emphasised that Professional Development can impact various aspects of teachers' professional and personal lives, including their knowledge, competencies, and values.

Generally, professional development aims to equip teachers to acquire new knowledge, learn how to apply it effectively, and utilise it in their teaching to help students advance. However, numerous processes, activities, and procedures are involved in teacher professional development, all of which are inextricably influenced by the context's cultural, social, political, and economic traits and conditions (Tan & Dimmock, 2014). As a complex process, teacher professional learning requires teachers' cognitive and emotional engagement, both individually and collectively, as well as their capacity and willingness to examine their convictions and beliefs and to read about and implement suitable alternatives for improvement (Avalos, 2010). This study aims to investigate the implications of student reflective journals on the professional development of student teachers. By examining the experiences and outcomes of student teachers who engage in reflective journaling, this study aims to contribute to understanding how reflective practices can be effectively integrated into teacher education to support the development of reflective, adaptive, and skilled educators.

Teacher Education in Ghana has undergone several modifications to fulfil the need for skilled teachers, including programme changes, organisational structure adjustments, and facility expansions. The Colleges of Education Act, 2012 (Act 847) transformed the educational institutions into tertiary institutions. Act 847 outlines a few fundamental duties of Colleges of Education, including (a) exposing students to cutting-edge teaching and learning methods to foster critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in the classroom and (b) making sure that basic research and action research is an essential component of teacher preparation to support high-quality teaching and learning in the classroom. Teachers' training is essential to raising quality (Harrison, 2012).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Ghana, reflective journals are integrated into the New B.Ed educational curriculum for teacher trainees, as part of their supported teaching in school activities, is intended to enhance the reflective capacities of student-teachers, thereby contributing to their professional growth as 21st-century teachers. Despite the growing advocacy for reflective practices in teacher education, many student teachers in Ghana face challenges in fully engaging with reflective journaling due to their inadequate knowledge and guidance on effectively using it. Most student-teachers struggle to understand and complete the SRJ; therefore, the poor development of the SRJ by student-teachers is more likely to negatively impact their professional development. This could result in reflective journals being underutilised as tools for professional development. Moreover, its impacts on the various dimensions of professional development, such as pedagogical skills, self-awareness, and classroom management, may not be well-documented. Given this, this study aims to explore the implications of reflective journaling on the professional development of student-teachers at Enchi College of Education, seeking to fill a gap in the existing literature and provide insights into how

reflective practices can be better integrated into teacher education programs to enhance the overall quality of teaching.

More so, there appears to be some written material on Ghanaian students' reflective journals. Reflective Journal Writing: Pre-service teacher attitudes were the focus of Arthur and Sagoe Arthur's (2021) study. Osei, Mensah, and Bampo's (2020) study examined the perspectives of teachers and student teachers on reflective practices in teaching and learning in basic public schools in the Gomoa East District of the Central Region of Ghana. This study builds on Reflective Practice in Teacher Education in Ghana by Amakyi and Ampah-Mensah (2014). Despite the aforementioned interventions, little has been observed in the literature regarding students' reflective journals, necessitating the need for this investigation. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the impact of student reflective journals on the professional growth of student teachers in Ghanaian educational institutions. The following research questions guided this study. What is the nature of the responses student-teachers of Enchi College of Education provide when completing the SRJ? How does the filling of the SRJ impact the professional development of student-teachers at Enchi College of Education?

3. LITERATURE SURVEY

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) underpins the study. David A. Kolb developed this theory in the 1980s, building upon John Dewey's and Kurt Lewin's earlier work. It posits that learning is a process through which knowledge is created by transforming experience. This theory serves as a foundation for understanding how reflective practices, such as Students' Reflective Journals (SRJs), contribute to the professional development of student-teachers.

3.1.1. Core Components of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

- **Concrete Experience (CE):** In this initial stage, learners engage directly with an experience. Student-teachers could participate in a classroom setting, conduct lessons, or interact with students.
- **Reflective Observation (RO):** After the experience, learners reflect on what they did, observing any discrepancies between their expectations and outcomes. This stage encourages critical thinking about how their practices align with educational theories and students' needs.
- **Abstract Conceptualisation (AC):** In this process, learners formulate hypotheses and draw conclusions based on their reflections. They develop new insights that can change their understanding and approach to teaching.
- **Active Experimentation (AE):** The final stage involves applying the new ideas in practice and testing them in real situations. This step leads to new experiences, completing the learning cycle.

The Learning Cycle: Kolb suggests that effective learning involves progressing through these four stages in sequential order. Each stage builds upon the next, enabling continuous improvement and a deeper understanding of one's practice (Kolb, 1984).

Learning Styles: Kolb also identified four distinct learning styles related to the learning cycle: diverging (feeling and observing), Assimilating (observing and thinking), Converging (doing and thinking), and Accommodating (doing and feeling). Each student-teacher may have a preferred learning style, influencing their engagement with reflective practices.

Reflection and Adaptation: The cycle emphasises the importance of reflection as a means to adapt and reformulate teaching practices. For student-teachers, maintaining a reflective journal facilitates this introspective process, fostering a habit of continual learning and adaptation (Rodgers, 2002; Larrivee, 2008). Kolb's theory emphasises that through experiential learning, engaging in concrete experiences followed by reflection, student-teachers can develop a deeper understanding of their teaching practice. The reflective journal serves as a critical tool, enabling individuals to document their experiences, reflect on them analytically, and derive actionable insights.

3.2. Nature of Responses student-teachers of Enchi College of Education provide in completing the SRJ

The literature review was drawn from existing research on reflective journals in teacher education to analyse and understand the nature of responses at Enchi College of Education. Reflective journals like the SRJ enable student-teachers to evaluate and improve their teaching critically, aligning personal growth with professional development. Rodgers (2002) refined Dewey's (1933) original model of reflective thinking by highlighting that reflection is not a one-time activity but an ongoing, cyclical process. According to Rogers, this continuous process creates a cycle of learning and improvement, where each reflection informs and enhances the following action, fostering ongoing growth and development. Zeichner and Liston (2013) also expanded on Dewey's (1933) ideas about reflective thinking by emphasising how student-teachers can utilise reflection to foster social justice and equity in education. They argue that teacher reflection should focus on improving teaching practices and critically examining the social, cultural, and institutional factors that affect students' learning experiences. Student-teachers' responses in reflective journals can range from descriptive, where they merely recount classroom events and actions without analysis, to analytical, where they examine the impact of their decisions and consider alternative strategies. The most advanced level is critical reflection, where they assess their teaching practices in the context of broader educational theories and values, linking their experiences to larger educational frameworks. According to Larrivee (2008), critical reflection involves questioning assumptions, addressing biases, and considering the sociocultural contexts within which education occurs.

Several factors can also influence student-teachers' responses in their reflective journals. Studies show that the quality of mentorship plays a significant role in the depth of student-teacher reflective responses. For example, Hoban (2002) reiterates that students who receive constructive feedback from mentors tend to engage in more profound, critical reflections. Conversely, when reflective journaling is done in isolation or without structured guidance, responses may remain surface-level or purely descriptive. In addition, research by Kember et al. (2008) found that novice student-teachers often begin with descriptive reflections. They gradually progress to more analytical and critical reflections as they gain teaching experience and become more comfortable with the reflective process. Student teachers often face time constraints, especially when balancing teaching practice with coursework. According to Moon (2004), time pressure can lead to rushed or less thoughtful reflections, where student teachers may opt for brief descriptions rather than engaging in critical reflection. At Enchi College of Education, similar challenges influence the depth and quality of responses in SRJs.

3.3. How Students' Reflective Journal Impact on Professional Development of student-teachers

Reflective practice also helps teachers understand the many educational situations (Parra, Gutiérrez & Aldana, 2014). Understanding the various educational contexts helps teachers develop effective techniques to approach their teaching more coherently. In addition, Kheirzadeh and Sistani (2018) assert that reflective practice significantly

contributes to improving the effectiveness of teachers who are currently ineffective. When unsuccessful teachers employ reflective practice, they can more effectively assess their learning development needs, identify the most effective delivery strategies, and experiment with innovative approaches to gain fresh perspectives on their lesson plans. Reflective practice also helps student teachers become more self-aware and unlearn ineffective teaching strategies that could lead to students having a negative learning experience (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2015). Korthagen (2017) believes reflective practice can produce novel and productive classroom behaviour. This allows student teachers to use the practice to identify what needs to change in the classroom (Olaya-Mesa, 2018). In essence, the habit of student teachers reflecting on their teaching actions helps them recognise and analyse complicated classroom difficulties and find the best solutions for the mutual benefit of the teacher and the pupils.

Research indicates that reflective practice helps improve teacher quality (Suphasn & Chinokul, 2021) and also enhances teachers' self-efficacy, thereby improving the professional teaching performance of in-service teachers (Gutiérrez, 2015; Miradkhani, Raygan & Moein, 2017). Reflective practice enables teachers to understand how students acquire knowledge and learn effectively (Boateng & Boadi, 2015). Reflective practice also enhances both instructors' professional practices and students' academic results (Olaya-Mesa, 2018). East (2014) also discovered that reflective practice enhances pre-service and in-service teachers' innovative educational methods. Students preparing to teach at the elementary level should practice reflective teaching to improve their skills and better serve themselves and their pupils. In-service instructors should also firmly embrace and practice reflection in their instruction delivery. If they regularly practice reflectively, tutors in colleges of education would see a qualitative shift in their competencies. This necessitated the current study investigating how College of Education tutors comprehend and apply reflective practice in their teaching.

According to Maloney and Campbell-Evans (2002), the interaction between journal authors and their readers allows student teachers to clarify practical theory. Student teachers can critique and modify their practice through analysis and critical observation (Gil-Garcia & Cintron, 2002). Mentoring, in the opinion of Hine (2000), fosters the growth of "more self-reflective, metacognitively aware, and self-directed learners." Writing in a reflective diary is essential for fostering student connection, boosting motivation, and fostering critical thinking abilities. Additionally, several researchers have indicated that children perform better on the topic.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

The study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design to investigate the implications of students' reflective journals on the professional development of student-teachers in Ghana. The purpose was to describe and interpret the current status of individuals, settings, conditions, or events (Mettler, 2018). This will allow researchers to study the phenomenon of interest as it naturally exists; no attempt was made to manipulate the individuals, conditions, or events. The study population comprised tutors and student-teachers from Enchi College of Education. The institution is the sole college in the Western North Region affiliated with the University of Ghana. In 2023, it was recognised as the top college for the fidelity of the Bachelor of Education Curriculum implementation among all 46 Colleges of Education in Ghana.

Additionally, in 2024, it became the overall best college among all affiliated with the University of Ghana, Legon. A total of 432 participants were involved, comprising 325 student-teachers, 77 mentors, and 30 college tutors, who were selected through stratified sampling from Enchi College of Education and its partner basic schools. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire divided into sections covering demographics, understanding of reflective journals, and their impact on professional development. The questionnaire utilised a five-point Likert scale to

determine the perceptions and attitudes of the respondents. To ensure the instrument's validity, experts from the education department reviewed the questionnaire. Reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha, yielding an acceptable score of 0.81 (Cronbach, 1951). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, with Microsoft Excel 2019 aiding the process. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant authorities, and participation was voluntary, with informed consent. The confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were strictly maintained throughout the research process. The findings were interpreted based on participants' responses and statistical results, ensuring that the study's objectives were met effectively and efficiently.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

This aspect of the paper presents the analysis results of the respondents' opinions. All three responses (from students, tutors, and Mentors) were collected for each research question to determine variations and consistencies in the responses, thereby enabling informed recommendations to improve professional practices in the college.

5.1. Data analysis

5.1.1. Nature of responses student-teachers provide in the SRJ

Results from Table 1 revealed that a higher percentage of student-teachers (77.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that they could provide concise responses to the items in the SRJ. However, 20% disagreed or were undecided, indicating variability in response quality. Additionally, a notable proportion (48.9%) admitted to providing inaccurate responses due to misunderstanding the items, with 37.9% disagreeing that this is an issue. This reflects a significant challenge in interpreting SRJ tasks. Interestingly, 43.7% admitted to copying their peers' responses, suggesting a lack of originality and a limited understanding of the issues. Conversely, 47.1% disagreed, indicating a divide in practices.

In addition, 58.8% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that grammatical issues affect their responses, while 25.2% disagreed, highlighting a need for language support. A sizable 47.1% indicated that the lack of mentor support prevents them from completing the SRJ, while 40.6% disagreed. Similarly, 48% cited a lack of tutor support as a barrier to completing their SRJ, with 29.5% disagreeing. This underscores the need for more active involvement from tutors.

Table 1: Students Reactions on the Nature of Responses Student-Teachers Provide in the SRJ

Statement	SD		D		UND		A		SA	
	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%
Student-teachers can provide concise responses to the items in the SRJ.	8	2.5	36	11.1	29	8.9	160	49.2	92	28.3
Student-teachers provide inaccurate responses because they do not understand how the items are constructed.	51	15.7	72	22.2	43	13.2	95	29.2	64	19.7
Student-teachers copy responses from colleagues to fill in the spaces because the SRJ needs to be completed.	87	26.8	66	20.3	30	9.2	87	26.8	55	16.9
Student-teachers struggle with the SRJ but often face grammatical challenges.	27	8.3	55	16.9	52	16.0	128	39.4	63	19.4

Student-teachers cannot fill the SRJ because they lack the necessary support from their mentors.	51	15.7	81	24.9	40	12.3	86	26.5	67	20.6
Student-teachers cannot fill the SRJ because they do not get the support they need from college tutors.	69	21.2	73	22.5	27	8.3	64	19.7	92	28.3

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 2 evaluates the nature of the responses student-teachers provide in the SRJ. The responses generally indicate that 74% of the respondents believed student-teachers provide concise responses to the items in the SRJ, and the 26% who disagree or are undecided highlighted that a significant portion of the student-teachers struggle with this aspect. Similarly, 69% of the mentor respondents acknowledged that the student-teachers provided inaccurate responses due to difficulties in understanding the questions, indicating issues with either the SRJ's design or the student-teachers' comprehension. Furthermore, 60% of the respondents reported that most student-teachers copy from their peers, indicating a substantial issue with academic integrity or a lack of confidence in their responses. The results suggest that student-teachers are capable of producing concise and accurate reflections. However, many struggle with comprehension, grammatical issues, and a lack of support. The high incidence of copied responses raises concerns about the authenticity of reflections and points to a broader issue of academic honesty.

Table 2: Mentors' Reactions on the Nature of Responses Student-Teachers Provide in the SRJ

Statement	D		SD		UND		A		SA	
	n	%	N	%	n	%	N	%	N	%
1. Student-teachers can provide concise responses to the items in the SRJ.	-	-	3	13	3	13	8	35	9	39
2. Student-teachers provide inaccurate responses because they do not understand how the items are constructed.	2	9	2	9	3	13	6	26	10	43
3. Student-teachers copy responses from colleagues to fill in the spaces because the SRJ needs to be completed.	-	-	6	26	3	13	7	30	7	30
4. Student-teachers the SRJ but with grammatical challenges.	1	4	3	13	1	4	8	35	10	43
5. Student teachers cannot fill the SRJ because they do not get supplies from supplies, mentors, or students.	2	9	6	26	3	13	5	22	7	30
6. Student teachers cannot fill out the SRJ because they do not get the support they need from college tutors.	4	17	2	9	2	9	12	52	3	13

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 3 presents tutors' views on how student-teachers respond to the Student Reflective Journal (SRJ) items. The data showed that most tutors (86%) agreed that student-teachers can provide concise responses in the SRJ. However, 10% were undecided, suggesting that some tutors may observe variability in how well student-teachers perform this task, possibly due to differences in their writing skills or the clarity of the SRJ prompts. Similarly, most tutors (73%) agreed that student-teachers sometimes provide inaccurate responses due to misunderstandings about constructing SRJ items. This suggests that the phrasing or structure of the SRJ prompts may not always be precise to student-teachers, leading to errors. However, 23% of the tutors disagreed with the indicator.

A significant number of tutors (87%) agree or strongly agree that student-teachers struggle to complete the SRJ due to a lack of support from mentors. This suggests that mentors may not provide sufficient guidance, feedback, or encouragement for student teachers to engage effectively with the SRJ. The small percentage (13%) who disagree or are undecided may suggest that some mentors perceive the issue as less widespread or believe that the problem lies

in areas other than the lack of support from mentors. Most mentors (80%) agree or strongly agree that a lack of support from college tutors hinders student-teachers from completing the SRJ. This suggests that college tutors may not consistently provide the necessary guidance for student-teachers to engage with the SRJ successfully. The 20% who disagree or are undecided may indicate variability in how different tutors provide support, with some student-teachers receiving adequate guidance while others do not.

Table 3: Tutor's Reactions on the Nature of Responses Student-Teachers Provide SRJ

Statement	D		SD		UND		A		SA	
	n	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Student-teachers can provide concise responses to the items in the SRJ.	-	-	3	10	1	4	13	43	13	43
2. Student-teachers provide inaccurate responses due to their limited understanding of how the items are constructed.	4	13	3	10	1	3	10	33	12	40
3. Student-teachers copy responses from colleagues to fill in the spaces because the SRJ needs to be completed.	-	-	6	20	3	10	7	23	14	47
4. Student-teachers the SRJ but with grammatical challenges.	-	-	3	10	1	4	8	27	17	57
5. Student teachers cannot complete the SRJ because they do not receive the support they need from mentors or students.	2	6	-	-	2	7	15	50	11	37
6. Student teachers cannot fill the SRJ because they do not get the support they need from college tutors.	4	13	-	-	2	7	16	53	8	27

Source: Field survey, 2024

5.1.2. The impacts of SRJ on the professional development of student-teachers in Enchi College of Education

Table 4 examines the influence of the SRJ on the professional development of student-teachers. Based on the results below, the majority (83.4%) agreed that they can critically observe and record competencies using the SRJ. However, 11.6% were undecided or disagreed, indicating room for improvement. Most respondents (84%) felt confident in asking challenging questions and understanding classroom observations, but 14.7% were undecided or disagreed. Similarly, 85.5% agreed that the SRJ exposes them to professional tasks, though 14.5% were unsure. Furthermore, 83.4% of the respondents valued pre- and post-interactions with mentors and tutors to gain experiences that would improve their knowledge for practice. However, 16.6% were undecided or disagreed, reflecting inconsistencies in these interactions.

Table 4: The Impact of the SRJ on the Professional Development of Student-Teachers

Statement	D		SD		UND		A		SA	
	N	%	N	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
1. Student-teachers can observe competencies critically and record them in the SRJ.	16	4.9	15	4.6	23	7.1	164	50.5	107	32.9
2. Student-teachers can ask challenging questions and understand everything they observe in the classroom before recording.	4	1.2	29	8.9	19	5.8	163	50.2	110	33.8

3. The SRJ is a work record for the student-teacher to refer to whenever needed.	4	1.2	22	6.8	23	7.1	141	43.4	135	41.5
4. SRJ exposes the student-teachers to specific professional tasks to know, understand and practice.	6	1.8	16	4.9	25	7.7	144	44.3	134	41.2
5. Pre-and-post interactions of the SRJ with College tutors and Mentors help student-teachers acquire experiences to improve their knowledge for practice.	22	6.8	9	2.8	23	7.1	121	37.2	150	46.2

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 5 presents the results from mentors regarding the impact of the SRJ on the professional development of student teachers. The results showed that 74% agree that the SRJ helps student-teachers to critically observe and record competencies, though 26% were undecided or disagreed, indicating some inconsistency in the SRJ's impact. Additionally, 78% of the mentors agreed that SRJ enables student-teachers to ask challenging questions and understand everything they observe in the classroom before recording their observations. However, 22% who disagreed suggested that some student-teachers might not fully engage with this aspect.

Regarding the pre- and post-interactions of SRJ with mentors and tutors, 87% of the respondents recognised the value of pre- and post-interactions with tutors and mentors in improving student-teacher knowledge. However, 13% disagreed, indicating inconsistencies in the quality or frequency of these interactions. The SRJ is primarily recognised as a critical tool for professional development, particularly in recording competencies and serving as a valuable reference. However, the mixed responses regarding its role in fostering critical questioning and exposure to professional tasks suggest that not all student-teachers benefit equally from the SRJ process.

The strong agreement on the SRJ's function as a record-keeping tool contrasts with the less consistent views on its ability to expose student-teachers to specific tasks, indicating potential areas for enhancement in how the SRJ is used in practical settings. The value placed on pre- and post-interactions with tutors and mentors is high. However, the fact that some student-teachers remain unsure about these interactions implies that there may be variability in how these sessions are conducted. Ensuring consistency and quality in these interactions could significantly enhance the SRJ's impact on professional development.

Table 5: Mentors' Responses on the Impact of SRJ on the Professional Development of Student-Teachers

Statement	D		SD		UND		A		SA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Student-teachers can observe competencies critically and record them in the SRJ.	-	-	4	17	2	9	14	61	3	13
2. Student-teachers can ask challenging questions and understand everything they observe in the classroom before recording their observations.	-	-	5	22	-	-	10	43	8	35
3. The SRJ is a work record for the student-teacher to refer to whenever needed.	-	-	-	-	1	4	13	57	9	39
4. SRJ exposes student-teachers to specific professional tasks to enable them to know, understand, and practice.	-	-	3	13	1	4	13	57	6	26
5. The SRJ's pre- and post-interactions with College tutors and Mentors help students and teachers acquire experiences that improve their knowledge for practice.	2	9	1	4	-	-	9	39	11	48

Source: Field survey, 2024

The results in Table 6 indicate that the majority, 74%, of the respondents agreed that student-teachers can critically observe and record competencies in the SRJ. However, 17% of the respondents disagreed. Again, 78% of the tutors agreed that student-teachers can ask challenging questions and understand everything they observe in the classroom before recording their observations. On the contrary, 22% of the respondents disagreed with the indicator. Furthermore, most tutors (87%) agreed that pre- and post-interactions with the SRJ and interactions with college tutors and mentors help student-teachers acquire experiences that improve their knowledge for practice.

Table 6: Tutor's Responses on the Impact of SRJ on the Professional Development of Student-Teachers

Statement	D		SD		UND		A		SA	
	n	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Student-teachers can observe competencies critically and record them in the SRJ.	-	-	3	17	2	9	16	61	9	13
2. Student-teachers can ask challenging questions and understand everything they observe in the classroom before recording their observations.	-	-	5	22	-	-	12	43	13	35
3. The SRJ is a work record for the student-teacher to refer to whenever needed.	-	-	-	-	1	4	18	57	11	39
4. SRJ exposes student-teachers to specific professional tasks to enable them to know, understand, and practice.	-	-	2	13	2	4	16	57	10	26
5. The SRJ's pre- and post-interactions with College tutors and Mentors help students and teachers acquire experiences that improve their knowledge for practice.	2	9	1	4	-	-	13	39	14	48

Source: Field survey, 2024

5.2. Discussions

5.2.1. Nature of Responses Student-Teachers Provide in the SRJ

The study's findings reveal notable challenges in student-teacher interactions as reflected in their Student Reflective Journals (SRJs). Some student-teachers produce concise and insightful reflections, while others exhibit difficulties due to misunderstandings of the SRJ prompts, lack of sufficient support, or grammatical challenges. This inconsistency highlights a broader issue related to insufficient guidance from mentors and tutors, which impacts the effectiveness of the reflective process and professional growth of student-teachers. Parra, Gutiérrez and Aldana (2014) discussed that reflective practice enables educators to understand diverse educational contexts, resulting in more coherent and effective teaching techniques. Similarly, Kheirzadeh and Sistani (2018) suggest that reflective teaching significantly enhances the ability of ineffective teachers to become more effective by assessing student learning needs and experimenting with new approaches. This highlights the importance of strong guidance in the reflective process for enhancing teaching practices.

Ciampa and Gallagher (2015) emphasise that reflective practice promotes self-awareness and helps educators unlearn ineffective strategies that negatively impact students. Korthagen (2017) supports this by suggesting that reflective practice leads to novel and productive classroom behaviours. However, the variability in SRJ quality among student-teachers points to a lack of consistent support from mentors and tutors, which is crucial for adequate reflection and professional development. The issues of copying responses and grammatical errors further illustrate the need for better foundational skills in writing and critical analysis. Maloney and Campbell-Evans (2002) highlight that interactions between journal authors and their readers can provide opportunities for a more precise understanding and the practical application of theory. As Hine (2000) notes, effective mentoring fosters self-reflective and metacognitively aware learners, making it essential for mentors and tutors to support student-teachers in developing reflective skills.

Power (2012) asserts that the quality of reflective journal entries can be enhanced by providing explicit definitions, clear goals, constructive feedback, and well-defined grading criteria. This finding aligns with the observation that inconsistent SRJ quality may stem from inadequate support and guidance. Additionally, Gursansky, Quinn, and Le Sueur (2010) found that elements such as instructor feedback and online access contribute to the quality of journaling, emphasising the need for consistent and constructive feedback. The research by Anderson (2012) and Pavlovich (2007) further supports the importance of reflective practice in enhancing self-awareness and critical analysis. Pavlovich's study also highlights the challenges of marking reflective journals, which require a trusting relationship between teachers and students. This relationship is essential for authentic engagement in reflective practices.

The study aligns with Dewey's (1933) concept of reflection as an ongoing process where experiences inform subsequent actions, highlighting the cyclical nature of learning evident in students' reflective journals. Zeichner and Liston (2013) expand on this by emphasising the need for critical reflection that considers broader social and cultural contexts, which the study acknowledges as essential for student-teachers to enhance their pedagogical practices. Korthagen (2017) emphasises the importance of understanding fundamental classroom dynamics through reflective practice, suggesting that the challenges faced by student teachers in engaging with reflective journals can hinder their capacity to adapt and improve. Collectively, these perspectives emphasise that a deeper engagement with reflective practices is essential for developing qualified educators who can effectively navigate complex educational environments. The study recommends enhanced mentorship and structured guidance to promote this depth of reflection, aligning with these foundational theories.

5.2.2. The Impact of the SRJ on the Professional Development of Student-Teachers

The SRJ is widely recognised for its potential to enhance student-teachers' professional development by helping them document competencies, engage with challenging questions, and serve as a personal reference for their teaching practices. However, the effectiveness of the SRJ can be inconsistent, particularly among student-teachers who experience uncertainty about its benefits. This uncertainty often arises from inconsistencies in interactions with mentors and tutors, which can undermine the reflective process. Reflective practice is recognised as a significant contributor to professional growth, as it enables educators to engage deeply with their teaching experiences and develop a deeper understanding of their practices (Parra, Gutiérrez, & Aldana, 2014; Kheirzadeh & Sistani, 2018). When student-teachers are unclear about the benefits of the SRJ or face inconsistent guidance, its potential to facilitate meaningful reflection and professional development may not be fully realised.

The variability in perceived impact among student-teachers suggests that while the SRJ has transformative potential, its effectiveness is contingent upon consistent and practical facilitation of the reflective process. As Maloney and Campbell-Evans (2002) note, interactions between journal authors and their readers can clarify theoretical concepts and enhance practical understanding. Similarly, Hine (2000) emphasises that mentoring fosters self-reflective and metacognitive awareness, which is crucial for effectively using reflective tools like the SRJ. To maximise the SRJ's effectiveness, it is essential to ensure that all student-teachers receive meaningful and consistent guidance from mentors and tutors. This support helps student-teachers navigate the reflective process more effectively, fully realising the SRJ's potential to support their professional development (Power, 2012; Gursansky, Quinn & Le Sueur, 2010).

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory underpins the findings of this study, illustrating how reflective journaling enhances the professional development of student-teachers through its four stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. By engaging in classroom experiences and reflecting on these, student-teachers can critically analyse their practices and develop new insights (Rodgers, 2002). The iterative nature of this process ensures that they continuously adapt their teaching methods, fostering deeper learning and greater efficacy in their roles as educators. This reflects how structured reflection through SRJs can bridge the gap between theory and practice, ultimately enhancing their pedagogical skills and self-awareness.

Integrating Kolb's theory provides a framework for understanding the transformative potential of reflective practices in teacher education.

6. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The study on the impacts of Students' Reflective Journals (SRJ) on the professional development of student-teachers at Enchi College of Education reveals several research implications. First, it highlights the need for improved integration of reflective practices in teacher education programs, emphasising the importance of mentorship and structured guidance to enhance the quality of reflections. Second, the variability in student-teacher responses suggests more explicit SRJ prompts and training to promote critical thinking and originality. Third, the study suggests that further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of SRJs on teaching practices and student outcomes. Additionally, it calls for comparative studies across different educational contexts to understand cultural influences on reflective practices. Lastly, the findings advocate for workshops to clarify the roles of mentors and tutors, ensuring consistent support for student-teachers to maximise the benefits of reflective journaling in their professional growth.

7. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study on the impacts of Students' Reflective Journals (SRJ) on the professional development of student-teachers at Enchi College of Education makes a significant contribution to the scientific community by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of reflective practices in teacher education. It highlights the dual role of SRJs in enhancing self-reflection and professional growth while identifying challenges such as misunderstandings of prompts and a lack of support from mentors and tutors. These findings underscore the importance of structured guidance in the reflective process, suggesting that effective mentorship can lead to deeper engagement and improved teaching practices.

The study presents several avenues for future research, including investigations into the design and clarity of SRJ prompts, the development of effective mentorship models, and the long-term effects of reflective journaling on teaching efficacy and student outcomes. Comparative studies across various educational contexts could provide valuable insights into the cultural influences on reflective practices. The study also suggests the need for workshops to enhance the roles of tutors and mentors, which could further enrich the professional development of student-teachers. Overall, this research lays a foundation for advancing reflective practices in teacher education and improving the quality of teaching in Ghana and beyond.

Future studies could address the limitations of this research by expanding the scope to include multiple educational institutions across diverse regions in Ghana, thereby allowing for comparative analysis of reflective journaling practices. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methodologies, such as interviews or focus groups, can provide deeper insights into student teachers' specific challenges. Researchers could also examine the impact of different mentorship models on the effectiveness of reflective journals. Longitudinal studies could explore the sustained effects of reflective practice on teaching efficacy and student outcomes over time. Lastly, developing and testing structured training programs for mentors and tutors could help standardise student-teacher support in their reflective practices.

8. CONCLUSION

Generally, the significant contribution of the Student Reflective Journal (SRJ) to student-teachers in their professional career cannot be underestimated, especially with the introduction of the New B—Ed curriculum. The importance of reflective practice in teacher education programs, which highlights its role in developing teaching abilities and pedagogical knowledge, cannot be overstated. However, without adequate mentor and tutor involvement, the SRJ may not achieve its full potential in fostering reflective practices among student-teachers. It is recommended that

workshops should be conducted to clearly define and emphasise the roles of tutors and mentors in STS activities. A further study could also be conducted to examine the responses from other student teachers in other colleges regarding the completion of students' reflective Journals as a requirement of their programme of study.

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