Reflection in context: examining Senegalese novice teachers' online group reflection

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Abstract

Reflection is part of many teacher training programmes worldwide. Reflection has been proven to revitalise seasoned teachers' practice and help novices navigate the early years of their career smoothly. Popularised by Dewey's and Schon's works, reflection has evolved over the past decades, and authors like Mann and Walsh (2017) argue for more situated spoken and collaborative reflection. Nevertheless, in context like Senegal, reflection is not part of English as foreign language (EFL) teacher education programmes. Consequently, only one major study on reflection has been conducted so far (Diallo, 2024). Even in the wider context of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), teacher reflection is still under-researched.

In this perspective, this study aims to explore novice teachers' group reflection in the Senegalese context. After their pre-service training, novice teachers (NTs) in Senegal are posted in remote areas where most of the time they them work in isolation. The study involved eight NTs from different areas in Senegal, and online group reflection sessions were periodically organised on Zoom platform to give them opportunities for professional development.

Data was systematically collected online for a period of four months, then thematically analysed using NVivo software. The results of the data analysis showed that collaborative reflection allowed NTs to exchange good practice and combat their isolation. Reflecting in groups gave NTs a sense of belonging to a community of practice that fostered their professional growth. The results also revealed how context-specific factors can influence NTs' reflection. This study is a contribution to narrow the gap as far as research in reflection is concerned in SSA. It can also have implications for the introduction of reflection in EFL teacher education programmes in Senegal.

Key words: *Reflection; group reflection; collaborative reflection; context; novice teachers; professional development*

Introduction

Teacher training and development are key to effective teaching

and essential in ensuring good student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Reflection has become an important element in pre-service teacher training and teacher professional development programmes. The American educator John Dewey has hugely contributed to the development of reflection as well as his former student Donald Schön whose theory around *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* has influenced many researchers (Killeavy & Moloney, 2010; Birbirso, 2012; Kim & Silver, 2016; Shimizu & Kang, 2022). Reflective practice has achieved a status of orthodoxy in teacher education, nevertheless, its description remains elusive, general, and vague (Mann & Walsh, 2017). Reflection, for a teacher, consists of looking back at a taught lesson, re-evaluating it, considering what worked, what did not work, and how they might approach the same lesson differently (Camburn, 2010). It has been proven that reflection can revitalise experienced teachers' practice and help NTs go through the early years of their career smoothly (Farrell, 2013; 2016b)

Now, many teacher education programmes worldwide consider the ability to reflect as one of the hallmarks of an effective educator (Bean & Stevens, 2002). Thus, there is an ever-growing body of literature on reflection although the literature is still scant in sub-Saharan Africa and it is far under-researched in context like Senegal, where reflective practice is not even part of the teacher education landscape.

Reflective practice has become a focus of interest and a powerful movement in teacher education (Priya et al., 2017). However, in many teacher training programmes reflection remains an individual written assignment. As pointed out by Mann and Walsh (2017), reflective practice should not be understood as an individual enterprise, but it should also involve others, because teachers need to develop themselves over a lifetime of continuing professional development. According to Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) reflection is an

integral part of effective teacher professional development that enhances teacher learning.

In the digital era where NTs communicate extensively online, it is imperative to explore online reflection as an alternative to face-to-face. Additionally, COVID-19 restrictions have highlighted the importance of online group reflection as a continuing professional development (CPD) opportunity for teachers. In a context where teachers are used to collaboration such the collectivist Senegalese society, where the study was carried out, group reflection seems a natural fit. Thus, this study which was part of Diallo's (2024) PhD thesis, aimed to explore Senegalese NTs' online group reflection in context.

1. Context of the study

This study was carried out in Senegal, a West African French speaking country, with a population estimated at 18,126,390 (ANSD, 2023). Because of the outstanding hospitality of its people, Senegal is known as *Le pays de la Téranga* (the country of hospitality). Senegalese society is also characterised by its collectivist nature, with extended families. Senegal is a multilingual country with about 24 languages, Wolof is the most spoken language in the country. Despite its status as the *Lingua Franca* for people of different ethnic groups, Wolof is not part of the mainstream education system, French remains the official language of the country and the language of education.

English is the dominant foreign language at secondary school in Senegal, and students start learning it in their first year at secondary school, right after primary school. At lower secondary, students have 3 to 4 hours of English a week, and when they enter upper secondary school, depending on their streams, students have also three to four hours a week. Recently, there has been an initiative to introduce English at primary school and kindergarten to promote bilingualism and better

equip Senegalese students with skills that are perfectly suited to the job market and the international context.

Teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) are trained at the Faculty of Science and Technologies of Education *(FASTEF)* of Cheikh Anta Diop University, following a competitive entrance exam. EFL Teachers are recommended to use the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach in their classrooms and teach English for *communication*. They are encouraged to promote learner autonomy and use student-centred approaches that focus on student-student interaction. However, the Senegalese EFL teacher training syllabus does not include reflection on practice during trainee teachers' practicum. After their training, most EFL teachers are recruited by the government and posted in remote areas where they are often the only teacher of English and do not always have the opportunity to attend pedagogical cells (PCs) for their professional development. EFL in-service teacher trainers work with teachers within PCs to design and implement teacher professional development (TPD) activities which do not include reflection, although collaborative reflection could fit into PCs activities. Though Senegalese educational authorities acknowledge its importance for teachers' professional development, reflection is not part of teacher education programmes in Senegal.

2. Literature review

Various professional development opportunities should be provided to support novice teachers over the course of their career, including reflection, to improve their teaching practice and the quality of instruction (Uştuk & De Costa, 2021). Reflective practice is very often depicted as an individual practice, but in a collaborative view of teaching, colleagues can scaffold reflection together (Mann & Walsh, 2013). When they reflect in groups, novice teachers allow their peers to challenge

their beliefs and assumptions about their practice, and at the same time they can get different perspectives on teaching.

Farrell (2016c) shows how reflection helped three female native English-speaking novice teachers succeed in their novice year of teaching ESL by using his framework to reflect on their practice. The framework consists of five levels or stages: Philosophy, Principles, Theory, Practice, and Beyond Practice. All three novice ESL teachers reported how useful reflective practice was to their survival during a tough first year. The framework was used as a lens through which they examined and challenged embedded assumptions and gained awareness of what had shaped their professional lives. The results of Farrell's (2016c) study suggest that reflecting on practice can help novice teachers navigate the complex transition from their teacher education programmes to their first year as teachers. Just like their counterparts in Farrell's (2016c) study, Senegalese NTs' career start can be very tough because they are often posted in remote areas where they are the only EFL teachers in their schools. Therefore, collaborative reflection as aimed in this study can be an invaluable opportunity for Senegalese NTs to exchange with their peers and combat their isolation.

The literature on internet-based reflection shows that more and more educators use Web 2.0 tools in place of traditional reflective tools such as journals to engage novice teachers in reflection (Romano, 2008). In Hammond's (2000) study, group reflection through online forums allowed first-year teachers to communicate their experience to their peers and exchange didactic materials. Additionally, the novice teachers in the study expressed how the online discussion helped them see that they were not the only ones going through anxieties or frustrations with their teaching. Similarly, Killeavy and Moloney (2010) show that newly qualified teachers (NQTs) value the benefits in reflecting with their peers and find

reassurance in realising that they are not alone and that others are in the same situation.

With the trend on collaborative reflection enabled by technology, reports on online reflective communities have flourished. In this regard, Cansoy's (2017) findings support the idea that online communities of practice provide a social environment in which professional development of teachers is supported. Thus, it is important to urge NTs to form online communities of practice as it allows them to participate in collaborative learning, reflect their own practices to other teachers and get mutual emotional support (Macià & García, 2016, as cited in Cansoy, 2017).

Although context plays an important role in teachers' reflection processes, it has not been given due attention in the literature on novice teacher reflection. Every reflection takes place in a particular context, therefore reflective tools and methods that are successful with one type of teacher in a given context cannot be *imported* into a different context with different teachers. In this regard, most sub-Saharan African studies on teacher reflection report teachers who used reflective approaches that work in individualist high-income settings that were imported and applied in their low-resource community orientated contexts. For instance, Reed et al (2002) used a reflective framework to facilitate South African teachers' reflection, but it was not effective as it did not fit their context. In this perspective, Boud (2009) rightly notes that:

> Practice always occurs in a particular setting and even if the type of activity is similar to that which occurs elsewhere, the practice and reflection on it is particular. The people involved vary, the influences of the organisation vary and power relations vary. This means that any standardised approach to reflection must be treated with great caution. What is appropriate in one set

> of conditions does not necessarily transfer to another. It is tempting to find a process of reflection that has worked well for others and import it into a new setting. Such importation of procedures needs to be treated with caution. Do they fit the different circumstances, different purposes, different people and different expectations? (p. 33)

Boud (2009) argues against the wholesale adoption of reflective models and approaches from one context to another. This highlights the "one-size-fits-all" problem where a particular reflective tool, e.g., observation-based reflection, is not sufficiently orientated to particular contextual needs. For example, Mann and Walsh (2017) advocate the use of evidence as an impetus to teacher reflection such as observation notes by a teacher who observed a colleague, but observation might not be a good option to trigger novice teacher reflection in all contexts. This is illustrated by Naci Kayaoğlu et al.'s (2016) study in which they found that classroom observation did not support the reflection of the only novice teacher participant in their context. Although the novice teacher in the study shared a positive view of reflective practice stressing its role to enhance teaching, she stated that as she was a novice teacher lacking teaching experience, the presence of another person as an observer in her own classroom disturbed her, as she preferred her mistakes not to be reported by an outsider. The authors aimed to facilitate the novice teacher's reflection through observation notes, but using classroom observation did not help enhance her reflection in the Turkish EFL context of the study. Although the authors recognise that the reflective tool used in their study was unfit for the context, there is no description of the influence of contextual factors on the novice teacher's reflection, and this is also noted in the literature on NTs' reflective practice as a whole. Context needs to be addressed further in teacher reflection from

various context. Thus, this study aimed to explore NTs' reflective practice through group reflection, which was thought to be more appropriate for a collectivist society like the Senegalese one. This study tried to answer two major questions:

1. How do Senegalese novice EFL teachers engage in online group reflection?
2. In what ways do contextual factors influence Senegalese novice EFL teachers' reflection?

These two questions shaped the study that was carried out in the Senegalese context. The next section describes the methodology that was used to answer the two research questions.

3. Methodology

This study was underpinned by a constructivist paradigm which "assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and subject create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures." (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 27). From a constructivist perspective, reality is viewed as socially constructed, so investigating social reality emphasises the importance of subjective experience of individuals (Cohen et al., 2011). Thus, teachers' reflection always depends on their context, culture, background and personal experiences. A constructivist philosophical belief about reality lends itself to qualitative research methodology which was used in this study.

This qualitative study employed a case study, which is defined by Silverman (2005) as a type of research that focuses on a given object of research within its context, in order to explore it in detail. Specifically, a collective case study was used, as this study aimed to analyse different cases (or NTs), and provide a detailed exploration of their reflection in context.

Additionally, the review of the literature has shown that case study is a common approach to investigate teacher reflection for professional development (Fazio, 2009; Bee Choo et al., 2016; Burhan-Horasanlı & Ortaçtepe, 2016; Farrell, 2016c). The choice of using a collective case study approach was justified by the research paradigm and the epistemological framework of the study.

3.1. Research participants

Eight EFL teachers who belonged to the 2021 cohort of FASTEF graduates took part in this study. They were recruited following a non-random sampling that Cohen et al. (2011) call a "convenience sampling", which involves choosing those who happen to be available and accessible at the time of the study. Among the eight teacher participants, there were six male and two female novices who had been teaching for four months at the start of the study. Six of them (four males and two females) were teaching in lower secondary schools and two (males) in upper secondary schools. They were between 24 and 34 years of age. They did their training together as lower and upper secondary teachers, some even had been in the same class. When they graduated, they were recruited by the government and posted in different places in Senegal. All of them were teaching in remote rural areas, the nearest was 200 km away from the capital city Dakar, and the farthest was 700 km away. They were all fluent in English and referring to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), their level of English was comparable to C1 level proficiency English users (Council of Europe, 2001). Participants' fluency in English was a real asset in this study as group reflection sessions were conducted in English, and there was no need for translation to carry out the data analysis. They were assigned pseudonyms for ethical reasons.

3.2. Data collection

Due to the restriction measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, data were entirely collected online in this study. Smartphones were hired with new sim cards and telephone numbers for each participant with enough airtime internet connection for group reflections.

Group reflections were organised on Zoom platform at regular intervals for the entire period of the study, from May to August 2021. After each NT had taught one lesson, and done a post-lesson reflection with a peer, a group reflection session was organised in order to allow research participants to reflect on their practice together. The online meetings were organised by the researcher via Zoom at weekends, and NTs reflected in groups on themes that were identified from a preliminary data analysis of post-lesson reflection transcriptions. Thus, four group reflection sessions were organised on Zoom, the first session was on *Teaching listening: from theory to practice*, the second on *Classroom management*, the third session was on *ELT issues (monitoring, giving instructions, error correction)* and the fourth and last one was on *Communicative Language Teaching* (*CLT*).

Prior to each meeting, the theme was sent to all NTs via WhatsApp by the researcher in order to give them an idea of what they were going to reflect upon. Though the researcher was the organiser of the meetings on Zoom, NTs moderated the four group reflection sessions in turn. Rules derived from Glazer et al. (2004) on collaborative reflection were adopted, whereby participants commit to (1) participate in the discussions; (2) be respectful and considerate toward other members and the facilitator; (3) respect the confidentiality of the group's discussions; (4) not bring up issues from the past unless they were pertinent to a present challenge. Consensus about online discussion protocols was reached (raising one's hand to speak,

muting microphones, not interrupting each other, etc.) and this helped build an acceptable level of trust, motivation, and effectiveness (Glazer et al., 2004).

The meetings also followed the pattern of Nolan (2008), to allow each participant to present their reflections while encouraging questions and comments at the same time. Experience from the pilot study had shown that it would be better to limit the reflection group session to approximately one hour, because less than an hour might not allow in-depth reflection on the topics, and more than an hour would be too much on NTs' busy schedule. Group reflections were recorded on Zoom and transcribed after for data analysis.

3.2. Data analysis

Inductive TA was chosen to analyse the data in this study because it is compatible with the constructivist paradigm underpinning this study as the development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The inductive analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to TA. The first step was familiarisation with the data through transcribing, reading and re-reading the data, and noting down initial ideas. The second step was generating initial codes. Coding the data was carried out at sentence level in order to capture meaningful information across the data. In this process, Initial ideas that convey similar recurrent information were collated to generate codes. The third step was about searching for themes. At this point, the analysis focused on the broader level of themes and consisted of sorting different codes into potential themes. Then, the themes were reviewed in the fourth step. During this phase, all the collated extracts for each theme were read again to ensure that they formed a coherent pattern. The fifth step consisted in defining and further refining the themes to be presented for reporting the findings. Then, NVivo was used to analyse the data. Software

like NVivo augment researchers' capacity to access, sort, and code data (Seale et al., 2011). Using this software allowed to save time and manage the huge amount of qualitative data. Using NVivo helped to substantiate the elaboration of themes by displaying supporting data linked to codes within themes. Then, the last step, i.e., producing the report could begin. The task of writing up this thematic analysis meant telling the story of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Results

This result section reports on how NTs engaged in collaborative reflection and also highlights contextual factors that influence NTs' synchronous online group reflection.

4.1. Features of NTs' online group reflection

Group reflection was new to NTs in this study and there was no specific framework to guide their reflection. During group reflection, NTs engaged freely in open discussions, sometimes challenging one another's views as illustrated in the extract below:

> **Adja:** I also like Seydi's idea and will do it in my class. Next question is: how do you group your students, by proximity, by friends or by level?
> **Elhadj:** this is a relevant question. I think that it is important to group students by mixing the levels, very often I take a very good student, an average student and one that has problems and group them. So, the student who is good can help the others. Sometimes students do not have problems, but they are shy, so putting them together helps them get rid of their shyness.
> **Adja:** For me, I do not put friends into the same group, otherwise they can be there chatting instead of working.

Most of the time I separate friends and group them with others they may not know very well, so that they can be serious. If also I notice some 'clans' in the class, I bring whoever I like into the same groups, for them to socialise.

Elhadj: Sometimes, separating students can be problematic. I take my own example, last time I sent out two students, because I took them from different groups and put them together, but they did not want to work together. Maybe they had problems outside the classroom, but they refused to interact, and I decided to send them out. That's why I think Seydi's idea to let those who sit side by side to work together is also good.

Adja: But Elhadj you're the one who makes rules in the class and solve those kinds of problems. They may have problems outside, but in the classroom, they have to work together.

Seydi: Classroom management is a challenge for experienced teachers, let alone novice teachers. We can use many strategies to put them together, what is most important is to give them clear instructions and engaging activities. When they are engaged in the activities you don't have many problems. When a group of students work together, after their production they should have rewards like +2 to the best group and +1 to the medium and +0.5 for the lowest performing group. But I want to ask Elhadj, if it was a good idea to send out students who refused to talk to each other…

Elhadj: For me the best way to punish them was to get them out of my class, because students who don't want to speak, don't deserve to be in the classroom. I send them out and I continue my lesson.

Seydi: I want to tell you, Elhadj, that we're all in remote areas and most of the time students belong to

polygamous families and they have some troubles outside the classroom. Sometimes it's between father and father or mother and mother, etc. when you force them it may be very complicated.
Elhadj: Thank you, that's a good point.

[Elhadj/Adja/Seydi/Ahmed/Modou/Group/Refl2]

In the extract above, Adja, the chairwoman for the second group reflection, introduces a discussion on 'grouping students while organising group work'. Seydi prefers to group students by proximity because most students sit by rows in Senegalese classrooms, whereas Elhadj groups students by level to rid them of their shyness and allow weak students to get support from their stronger classmates. As for Adja, she mixes groups and separates friends to avoid "clans" forming in her classroom. Whereas Elhadj is against separating students, and he shares his experience during which he was obliged to send out students who refused to work together. Adja and Elhadj defend different views and Seydi steps in to ease the tension that was growing between the two. Seydi did not think that Elhadj made a good decision by sending the students out, as the origin of their conflict might stem from polygamous families, so he recommended caution in this situation.

This thread of reflection illustrates how NTs challenged each other's views during discussions. However, there were not many examples like this because some NTs avoided contradicting their peers' views for fear they should take it as personal criticism. Expressing contradictions in public tends to be avoided in the cultural context of this study, which limited discussions and sharing of contradictory or challenging views during group reflections.

During group reflections, NTs repeated themselves or their peers by expressing the same ideas, going back to what was already said, or expressing again what was already said during

previous reflections. For example, on the third group reflection, Elhadj and Seydi literally said the same thing:

> **Seydi**: We should not correct every single error of our learners, sometimes we jot down the errors, and we correct them after the activity if it is writing or speaking. You can highlight the mistakes without pointing at those who made them. In grammar, I have another strategy, I block the mistake to where it comes from, meaning I correct it on the spot. If it's a speaking activity, I write vocab mistake, grammar mistake, and syntax mistake on a paper. Once they finish speaking, I correct all the mistakes.
> **Elhadj**: To answer the question. I'd say error correction is important, but the moment we should correct those errors is much more important. The moment we correct depends on the activity we give to students, for example if it's a grammar activity, if there is a mistake, I correct it on the spot. But when it is a speaking activity, I use delayed correction, I jot down all the mistakes that students make on a paper, the name of the student is not important. To make a long story short, correction depends on the activity we're doing.

[Seydi/Elhadj/Badu/Modou/Adja/Ahmed/Group/Refl3]

Error correction was one of the three topics discussed during the third group reflection on *ELT issues*. The meeting was chaired by Elhadj, and he asked his colleagues when they correct their students' errors, and in the extract above, Seydi says that he corrects grammar mistakes on the spot, but for speaking or writing activities, he jots down the students' mistakes and corrects them during feedback. Elhadj literally repeats what Seydi says and does not bring anything new in the discussion. There were a lot of similarities in NTs' views on this topic

because they were taught during their pre-service training to use on the spot correction for accuracy activities and delayed correction for fluency activities. So, instead of saying that they just do as their peers, some NTs repeated their peers' point of views.

Additionally, during group reflection, NTs often repeated ideas that were expressed in previous reflections which showed their interest in a particular topic. For instance, Seydi expressed his idea of "collaborative learning" several times during group reflection and Adja talked about "the importance of teaching pronunciation" whenever she had the opportunity during group reflection.

4.2. Influence of context-related factors on NTs' reflection

NTs in this study did their training together and some were even in the same class, therefore they knew each other quite well. Because of their familiarity, they reflected in a relaxed atmosphere during pair and group reflections. NTs joked and teased each other to make group reflection enjoyable, just as in the example below taken from the second group reflection:

> **Elhadj**: I disagree with you on some points. When you say that you bring students who misbehave to the administration, I don't agree, because when there is a problem in my class, it is up to me to fix it. I cannot ask the admin every time to help me solve my discipline problems.
> **Seydi**: Elhadj, hold on your horses.
> **(laughs)**
> **Elhadj:** Yes, I hold them.
> **(laughs)**

[Elhadj/Seydi/Modou/Adja/Ahmed/Group/Refl2]

During group reflection on discipline, Elhadj and Seydi said that

they beat their students sometimes as a way to punish them, and Adja advised them against that practice. Instead of beating students, she suggested referring them to the administration of the school. In the extract above, Elhadj says that, as a teacher he must be in charge of discipline issues in his classroom, he does not want to ask for help from the administration. Although Seydi beats his students, he disagrees with Elhadj and asks him in a funny way to "hold his horses" and listen carefully to Adja, who was giving them good advice. They laughed together and made a serious issue appear less daunting to solve it together. There were other examples of this kind in the data that show how NTs created a non-threatening atmosphere during group reflection that supported enhanced collaborative reflection. The relaxed atmosphere in which NTs reflected together fostered confidence, trust and support between them which was propitious for group reflection. NTs' relationships had an impact on their collaborative reflection just like other cultural factors, as described in the sub-section below.

Culture also was a very influential factor in NTs' reflection. Senegal is a collectivist society (Hofstede et al., 2010) and teachers have a sense of collaboration in their workplace. Building rapport plays a crucial role in teacher interaction. Whenever they met on Zoom for group reflection, NTs engaged in socialising, which is highly valued in Senegalese culture. Additionally, it was not uncommon for NTs to stop their reflection sessions for a short period and discuss current events in the society. Although socialising helped to relax the atmosphere, it reduced the time that could be spent in reflection. Additionally, Senegalese people avoid open contradiction and disagreement in their interactions, particularly in *public*. Therefore, some NTs avoided challenging their peers' views for fear they should consider it as a personal attack, which had an impact on the criticality of their reflection.

Furthermore, NTs displayed some Senegalese values that enhanced their reflective practice. *Sharing* is considered as a cardinal value among Senegalese people, that is why Senegal is known as the country of hospitality. NTs were prompt to share good practices during group reflection.

Furthermore, some NTs showed *humility* in front of their peers and their willingness to learn from them while reflecting in group. For example, Adja realised through discussion with Modou that she needed to find another way to ensure that her students understood her instructions rather than just asking them "Do you understand?":

> **Modou:** For me, when I give instructions, I don't ask them if they understand, I give examples if necessary.
> **Adja**: Why don't you ask them if they understand?
> **Modou**: If you ask them "Do you understand?", most of the time they answer "Yes", just because they are not at ease to say they don't understand in front of their classmates. Those who do not understand will never raise their hands to say that they don't understand. That's why I avoid this question.
> **Adja**: So, you're saying that we cannot trust them on this …
> **Modou**: Yeah, they say "Yes" even if they don't understand because I'm in Fula area, and the Fulas don't want to lose face, even if they don't understand, they prefer to keep silent than say it. They have "kersa"[1].
> **Adja**: I understand that because I'm Fula. Very relevant point, so we have then to avoid asking "Do you understand?" Thank you very much.

[Adja/Modou/Ahmed/Elhadj/Seydi/Badu/Group/Refl3]

The third group reflection was on *ELT issues* and NTs discussed how to ensure that students understand instructions. In the

[1] *Kersa* in this context means shyness.

extract above, Modou tells Adja, that the obvious answer of students to the question "Do you understand?" is "Yes" because this is related to *kersa* in Senegalese culture, and as mentioned in the introduction, *kersa* is much valued by Senegalese people. In the country area where Modou teaches, students like to save face and keep silent even if they do not understand instructions, which Adja understands very well because she belongs to the Fula ethnic group. Just like Adja, most NTs showed that they were not proud and were willing to learn good practices with humility from their peers which could help them bring changes in their teaching practice.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study are discussed in relation to each of the research questions and in the wider context of the existing literature on reflective practice. Building on the findings reported above, the discussion first focuses on the first research question related to how Senegalese novice EFL teachers engaged in online group reflection. Then, the discussion shifts on contextual factors that had an impact on NTs' reflection, in relationship with the second research question.

5.1. Process of Novice teachers' reflection

This study has revealed the nature of Senegalese NTs' reflection by highlighting how they reflected in the absence of any reflective framework. Although reflection in this study was initiated by the researcher, it was managed by NTs who viewed it as a professional development opportunity.

Online group reflection allowed NTs to reflect on key issues related to their context and their teaching practice such as teaching listening, classroom management, and other ELT issues. During group reflection, NTs shared their experiences and tips about teaching listening and envisaged together how to

overcome the challenges they face in their context. NTs particularly focused on classroom management while reflecting together. For Valli (1993), while reflecting on their teaching practice, novice teachers focus mainly on the teaching-learning process and particularly on classroom management because discipline and classroom disorder constitute major challenges for them. So, NTs in this study seized the opportunity offered by the online platform to discuss how to deal effectively with discipline in their classrooms.

Reflecting on ELT issues allowed NTs to bridge the gap between theory gained from their pre-service training and in-service practice on issues related to CLT, giving instructions, and error correction. Collaborative reflection helped NTs to question their beliefs and change their approach on issues like discipline (particularly on corporal punishment). It also provided them with a safe environment to be vulnerable, admit mistakes and ask for help (Larrivee & Cooper, 2006). This echoes Nolan's (2008) study in which novice teachers valued collaborative reflection which provided them with the opportunity to hear other people's reflections and express their own opinions. In addition, the results of Farrell's (2016b) case study suggest that the formation of a novice ESL teacher reflection group during their first year of teaching greatly facilitates their transition to becoming novice teachers.

Although there are guides and frameworks available in the literature to scaffold teachers' reflection (e.g., Farrell's, 2015 framework), none of these was used in this study, because these frameworks are not suitable for the context of the study, as most reflection guides require pre-existing knowledge in reflective practice that NTs in this study did not have (Larrivee, 2008; Birbirso, 2012) because reflection is not part of the teacher education programmes.

Some researchers like Larrivee (2008) argue that without carefully constructed guidance, prospective and novice teachers

seem unable to engage in pedagogical and critical reflection. However, this study showed that novice teachers are able to reflect at second and third levels of reflection without structured guidance. Referring to Diallo's (2024) typology, there was evidence of second level reflection (also known as pedagogical) when NTs like Ahmed reflected in groups on educational goals and the connections between theoretical principles and practice (Larrivee, 2008).

Critical reflection is the third dimension of the typology. There was evidence of third level reflection in NTs group reflection as they critically reflected on issues related to their teaching practice both inside and outside the classroom and the consequences of their actions such corporal punishment on the lives of their students.

5.2. Reflection shaped by context

The findings in this study indicate that context has a powerful influence on NTs' reflection. Their good relationship was a real asset in group reflection. From a broad perspective, the atmosphere in which NTs reflected and the impact of culture on their reflective practice was a positive one. During group reflection, NTs teased and joked with each other, which provided them with a very relaxed atmosphere that was conducive to enhanced collaborative reflection. In particular, the collegiality of the reflecting atmosphere provided NTs with a non-threatening atmosphere where they could expose their shortcomings to their peers with confidence.

The importance of having a non-threatening atmosphere of respect, empathy, trust, and good rapport to enhance novice teacher reflection has also been emphasized by researchers like Bassot (2013) in the literature. In the same vein, Dzay Chumlin (2015) included positive, encouraging, and sympathetic comments, as well as an informal tone during her intervention to make novice teachers feel that they were in an empathetic

atmosphere. Dzay Chumlin (2015) argues that novice teachers participate and articulate their personal reflections when they are in a friendly and kind environment even though they are being challenged. This study extends Dzay Chumlin's (2015) work to show that a non-threatening atmosphere can be created and fostered by NTs themselves without any support or intervention.

The findings of the current study were echoed by Nel's (2022), from a qualitative study which investigated the impact of joint reflection of three novice teachers and their supervisor on their practice. The results of the study showed changes in novice teachers' practice through reflection and constructive feedback from their peers. Above all, peer learning from each other was facilitated by the relaxed atmosphere in which the novice teachers reflected.

NTs in the current study were familiar with each other when they started to collaborate in reflective practice and that assisted in creating an atmosphere where they felt free and safe to share their views and to engage in more challenging issues. However, expressing different point of views puts Senegalese people on the defensive. Although NTs like Elhadj challenged their peers' views, some NTs avoided contradictions with their peers, which reduced opportunities to confront their ideas and engage in critical reflection. This shows that there is an interplay between context and culture and that context cannot always overcome deeply seated cultural values.

The high cultural value that Senegalese people place on relationships and building good rapport in society and in the workplace shaped NTs' reflection in this study. Before engaging in group reflections, NTs took time to socialise and instigate small talk. In a collectivist society like Senegalese, its members engage with the life of others and the workplace is characterised by the personal relationships among the employees (Hofstede et al., 2010). These social exchanges on NTs' personal and professional lives helped to break the ice at each online

reflection session and set a relaxed atmosphere, propitious for reflection. From this perspective, it can be argued that culture is an influential factor that needs to be taken into account if reflection is to be embedded in NTs' professional development in a context like Senegal.

Contrary to other studies which have investigated novice teacher reflection, this study emphasised how context and culture facilitate or impede reflection. Boud and Walker (1998) rightly pointed out that context has been a "seriously underdeveloped" dimension of discussions on reflection, partly because it is "so all-pervasive that it is difficult to recognise its influence" (p. 196). The findings of this study suggest that context-driven reflection can enhance NTs' practice and professional learning.

The findings also showed that NTs' experience of reflecting collaboratively gave them a sense of belonging to a professional learning community (PLC), which Stoll and Louis (2007) understand as "a group of teachers sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way." (p.2). The findings of the present study demonstrated that in Senegal, teachers' virtual PLC can be a powerful means of self-help and support, offering a context in which professional development can occur in a non-threatening and collaborative way (Mann & Walsh, 2017).

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore Senegalese novice EFL teachers' group reflection in context. Eight participants took part in this collective case study design and data were collected online through group reflection sessions. Data analysis was carried thematically using NVivo software. The findings that resulted from thematic analysis of the data highlighted the nature

of NTs' online group reflection which was characterised by discussion on key issues related to their classroom practice during group reflection. The findings also showed that contextual factors such as NTs' relationship and cultural norms impacted their reflective practice.

The findings of this study suggest that collaborative reflection seems to be an appropriate reflective approach for Senegalese NTs, fit for purpose and suited to NTs' context. In a collectivist society, such as Senegal, in which people value interaction and socialising, collaborative reflection might be more welcomed than individual reflection and this may lead to opportunities for deep reflection.

This study brings new perspectives on NTs' reflection in Senegalese context and sub-Saharan African context at large. This study contributes to better understand the role of context and culture in EFL teacher reflective practice. Reflection as conducted in most education programmes, originated from Western *individualist* societies. Therefore, reflection needs to be contextualised to be implemented in *collectivist* African societies. By focusing on the context of reflection, this study has shown that reflection is shaped by context and reflective tools and approaches need to be customized because *one-size* does not *fit-all*.

This study has implications for the development of a curriculum that includes reflection at pre-service level in Senegal. Trainee teachers should be familiarised with group reflection and once they begin their practicum in the second semester, they can be required to systematically reflect on their lessons with their peers. The findings of this study also provide enough evidence to support the inclusion of reflection in the CPD of Senegalese in-service teachers. Within their pedagogical cells, EFL teachers should be encouraged to reflect collaboratively under the supervision of their in-service teacher

trainer. Implementing reflection through these types of activities would help to make CPD sustainable in Senegal.

The main limitation associated with this study is related to the time frame of the study (four months) was not long enough to fully observe the development of NTs' reflective skills over time, although some showed significant development of their capacities to develop as reflective practitioners. As for future research, undertaking research that would involve both novice and experienced teachers might give more varied insights into NTs' reflective practice in the Senegalese context.

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