

**Reflexivity in Context: Navigating the Challenges of Conducting Qualitative Research
in International Business**

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Reflexivity in Context: Navigating the Challenges of Conducting Qualitative Research in International Business

Abstract

Contextual reflexivity plays an integral role in the development of a holistic understanding of International Business (IB) phenomena. Yet, there has been limited accounting of its relevance in qualitative IB research. This paper aims to theorize contextual reflexivity as an essential methodological tool for revealing how meaning is negotiated between the researcher and the researched within a specific social context.

By drawing insights from the experiences, reflexive diary, and field notes of the lead researcher as a Ph.D. student conducting research in Nigeria in 2019, this paper reveals ethical and epistemological dilemmas which the lead researcher encountered and how these shaped engagement, interpretation, and dissemination of research findings.

We aim to contribute to ongoing discussions on contextual reflexivity by introducing the Engaged Reflexive Researcher (ERR) framework as a reflexive tool for accounting for the context-sensitive nature of IB research. We suggest that this typology of contextual reflexivity has the potential to limit normative and conventional practices which trivialize knowledge and practices of different contexts. By incorporating contextual reflexivity, IB researchers can better account for the complex multidimensional nature of contexts and be better positioned to generate more holistic outcomes which are credible and trustworthy.

Keywords: Reflexivity, Context, International Business, Qualitative Research.

Track: Research Methodology

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Introduction

Although there is no ‘best strategy’ for conducting International Business (IB) research (Aguinis, Bergh, & Molina-Azorin, 2022), paying attention to the dynamic contextual realities of the International Business domain (Klemen & Rumens, 2012) has been reiterated overtime as a suitable approach for advancing knowledge within the field (Welch & Piekkari, 2017; Reuber & Fischer, 2021; Aguinis, Bergh, & Molina-Azorin, 2022). This requires reflexive engagement of the researcher with the research (Aguinis et al., 2022; Piekari, Welch, & Westney, 2022; Reuber & Fischer, 2021; Guttormsen & Moore, 2023), and the context of the research (Brannen, Piekkari, & Tietze, 2017; Wilmot & Tietze, 2020; Reuber & Fischer, 2021).

Despite growing interest on the importance of reflexivity, there is limited accounting of the relevance of context to theory, methodology, and practice in International Business (Nguyen & Tull, 2022). It is only relatively recently that IB scholars have started to acknowledge the legitimacy of reflexivity as a conceptual and empirical area of research (Welch, et al., 2002; Piekkari et al., 2022; Reuber & Fischer, 2021; LeCompte et al., 2023;).

This paper is grounded in the social constructionist philosophy. Within qualitative methodologies which challenge the essentialist descriptions of reality, social constructionism provides an encapsulating approach for understanding the interactions between individuals and society as each shape and is shaped by the other (Cunliffe, 2008). There is scholarly awareness and appreciation of various ontological and epistemological orientations to social constructionism (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967; Schutz, 1960; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Cunliffe, 2008). However, it is not the goal of this paper to provide a review of these orientations. Rather, we argue that irrespective of the orientation to social constructionism adopted, knowledge is constructed rather than created or discovered, and reality presents as multiple rather than single.

Contextual reflexivity is thus an acknowledgment of the multi-layered nature of reality in IB. It is based on an understanding that meaning is collectively negotiated between the researcher and the researched and as such, the researcher does not occupy a superior or privileged position. Rather, the researcher is also a subject constructed in and through the research (Alvesson, et al., 2008). International Business is generally focused on researching cross-cultural and cross-border phenomena which makes it even more imperative to question the claims we make about social scientific knowledge within IB (Welch & Piekkari, 2017), the absence of which could severely hamper the progress of knowledge production. Since the process of engaging with research and generating knowledge from a social constructionist standpoint requires reflexive practice (Cunliffe, 2003), social constructionism serves as a suitable lens through which a researcher could engage in contextual reflexivity.

In the following sections, we provide a summary of the research project, followed by a theoretical discussion of the concept of reflexivity. Methodological considerations that shaped the research process are drawn from the lead researcher’s personal experience of conducting Ph.D. research in Nigeria in 2019 to demonstrate how contextual arenas for reflexivity may manifest and be accounted for in research projects. Afterward, a discussion on the potential of the ERR framework as a guide for generating context-rich insights is put forward.

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Summary of the Research Project

The research upon which this paper is based was conducted using a qualitative case study of the fashion industry in Nigeria. The research aimed to understand how institutional factors shaped the sensemaking of cooperative and competitive (co-opetitive) interactions within formal and informal entrepreneurial networks.

The research took place in Nigeria. For the purpose of this study, the lead researcher travelled from Sheffield to Lagos, Nigeria for a period of 2 months. The study was grounded by a social constructionist philosophy while using a sensemaking and institutional theoretical framework to ground understanding.

The lead researcher was a Ph.D. student at Sheffield Hallam University but had spent her formative years in Nigeria and worked in the Nigerian fashion industry for a considerable amount of time. As such, she had previous working relationships with fashion designers in the industry. As such, the study was conducted within an environment that is familiar to the researcher, and for which, the researcher may be considered an ‘insider.’ However, multiple, and contrasting identities and realities which the researcher had acquired over time, created challenges to data collection and interpretation processes which were mitigated through a continuous, reflexive appraisal of the researcher’s sense of self and conscious navigation of shifting positionalities within the field that enhanced access, strengthened rapport and trust between the researcher and the researched (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020).

Forty-six participants were recruited through an ethical process of providing information on the research project to all participants and obtaining their written consent. Empirical insights were drawn from a combination of data sources (e.g., interviews, informal conversations, observations, and reflexive diary).

Reflexivity in International Business

There is a well-developed discussion on reflexivity in social science (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Hardy et al., 2001; Cunliffe, 2002; 2003), with ever-increasing attraction in the International Business field (Welch & Piekkari, 2017; Reuber & Fischer, 2021; Guttormsen & Moore, 2023; Mahadevan & Moore, 2023; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Essentially, these scholars challenge the assumptions of truth and reality in mainstream social science as absolute (Hardy et al., 2001; Welch & Piekkari, 2017) and call for a deeper awareness of reflexivity as a useful tool for accounting for the complex, ongoing, and multifaceted of social activity (Cunliffe, 2003), particularly considering the cross-cultural and cross-border nature of IB which makes it even more imperative to question the universal claims we make about social scientific knowledge (Welch et al., 2002; Welch & Piekkari, 2017).

This awareness has birthed the development of several typologies for carrying out reflexive research that can contribute to the quality of IB knowledge. Notable among these are Guttormsen et al.’s (2023) who extended Bourdieu’s (1989) theoretical concept of ‘epistemic

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reflexivity’ to introduce six arenas through which qualitative IB researchers could account for the impact of their individuality and engagement with the research on knowledge production. In a similar vein, Mahadevan and Moore (2023) emphasize the importance of acknowledging the researcher’s underlying epistemological positioning and describe the qualitative IB researcher as an interpreter of meaning who, through inter-subjective relations with the researched, transmits or disseminates their interpretation as ‘tales’ or ‘stories’ of the field to the research audience (Mahadevan & Moore, 2023).

Although typologies of reflexivity in IB may vary, they do not limit the arena of reflexivity to the researcher alone which is part of the criticisms trailing the concept. For instance, Hardy et al (2000) cite criticisms around this ‘inward turn’ as placing undue focus on the researcher and drowning the voice and agency of the researched. Other studies like Gentles, Jack, Nicholas, & McKibbin (2014) note motivations for reflexive accounting by qualitative researchers as a method for fulfilling quality and evaluation criteria that aims to neutralize the impact of the researcher’s subjectivity on the research outcomes.

Opposed to this, and in alignment with the discussions of reflexivity in IB, we argue for a more expansive view that acknowledges the interrelationship between the researcher, the researched, and the research context (Finlay, 2002). This appreciation of context as an essential phenomenon in IB further delineates the approach to reflexivity in IB from other disciplines because it recognizes IB as an interdisciplinary field where events are multidimensional, multidisciplinary, multicultural, and contextually embedded (Cheng, et al., 2009; Doz, 2011; Welch, et al., 2011; Welch & Piekkari, 2017; Welch et al., 2022).

Methodological Dilemmas and Decisions in the Research Project

A major challenge for qualitative IB researchers is the ambiguity and challenge of practicing and disseminating reflexive research (Cunliffe, 2003; Aguinis, et al., 2022; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023), due to the existence of several trade-offs and dilemmas in methodological choices (Aguinis et al., 2022), multi-dimensional contexts in IB (Welch & Piekkari, 2017; Welch et al., 2022) and various typologies of reflexivity (Finlay, 2002; Mahadevan & Moore, 2023).

To navigate these challenges in the empirical research project, methodological decisions and choices were guided by Milner’s (2007) framework. Through a conceptual discussion of racial and cultural education research, Milner (2007) expressed concern about how detachment from the researcher’s racialized and cultural positionality limits the researcher’s ability to recognize and acknowledge “*dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen*” such as varying perspectives, epistemologies and positions which may change the nature and depth of meanings as the researcher comes to know of themselves, their experiences and situations in a more in-depth manner. These dangers, according to Milner (2007), lead to misinterpretations and misrepresentations of the process and outcome of the research inquiry.

Milner (2007) recommends that researchers reflexively examine four dimensions:

- The *Self*: engaging in an evolving and emergent self-reflection during the research process.
- The *Self* in relation to *others*: Making sense of the researcher’s positionality in relation to the research participants.

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- *Engaged reflection and representation*: joint reflection between the researcher and the researched to potentially reduce misinterpretation of interactions or experiences and ensure that the voices of research participants are clearly articulated.
- *Shifting from Self to Systems*: consideration of broader contextual factors (e.g. social, cultural, economic, political, and racial realities of participants)

Although developed through the critical race theory for educational researchers on race and culture, the core ideas of the framework were found to be highly relevant for the empirical research upon which this paper is based, due to the framework's acknowledgment of the nature of complex and tension-filled contextual sites which may cause researchers to "rethink, readjust, and recalibrate their methodological tools" (Locke, 2015). The benefits of the framework are also captured by Lu & Hodge (2019) in a cross-cultural narrative inquiry who draw on its ability to uncover opportunities and challenges for negotiating meaning between the researcher and the researched due to the intersection of contextual constructs such as age, gender, and culture.

The following sections illustrate how this framework provided initial guidance for reflexive analysis in the research. Reflexive writing was used as a strategy for recording the experiences of the researcher in journals and field notes before, during, and after the research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Excerpts from these have been used as examples to reveal the practicalities of reflexive engagement as experienced by the lead researcher. To reflect the epistemological and reflexive position of this paper which requires visible manifestation of the researcher's presence, (Tang & John, 1999), a 'first-person' narrative is used in the illustrations below (Webb, 1992):

Researching the 'Self'

The beginning of my Ph.D. journey started with asking myself the question: *who am I?* To answer this question, I reflected on my socially constructed perception of my identity as 'Nigerian' which was not simply based on having spent my formative years there but based on my experience of the collectivist group orientation which featured in the maintenance of the strong family, social, religious, and cultural ties through which collective patriotism, commitment, and contribution to the socio-economic development of Nigeria were sustained (Ogbuagu, 2013). As a Nigerian, I then asked myself the question: *what do I want to know?* Again, drawing on my group orientation, the answer to this question had to be an answer that could serve the collective good of society. Prior to the commencement of my Ph.D. in 2017, Nigeria had experienced an economic breakdown in 2015 due to over-reliance on crude oil. To mitigate this, the federal government called for diversification into sectors such as service, ICT, agriculture, and fashion. Since I was a fashion designer, this sector was of particular interest to me, especially because of its growing global recognition and reputation. Fashion (clothing) was important to the typical Nigerian. Its importance extends beyond the narrow description of 'body' adornment' according to Western perspectives (Abiodun, 2014), to project deeper and culturally embedded meaning that view fashion (clothing) as inseparable

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from the individual's identity or '*iwa*' (character). An old Yoruba adage common within the South-Western region in Nigeria alludes to this:

Aso la nki, ki a to ki eniyan (we greet the dress before the greet its wearer).

Having this understanding of the importance of clothing to the typical Nigerian, as well as its potential for economic growth (e.g., Nigerian Bureau of Statistics reports a 0.24% contribution in 2021), I was interested in understanding why there was still a narrow appreciation of the industry's potentials. Casting my mind back to my experience of Nigeria as a collectivist society, I recalled how the opportunity to migrate to the United Kingdom was made possible by my mother's membership in a trade association through which she was able to secure a no-interest loan, which would have been near impossible to acquire from formal financial institutions. This brought to my mind the role of the broader institutional context and the importance of business relationships within this society.

[As a fashion designer in Nigeria, it was also customary for me to join networks that acted as complementary or substitute governance systems for failing formal institutions. Through my membership in these networks, my curiosity about the dynamics of simultaneous cooperative and competitive interactions among network members was stirred. I wondered if, and how the combination of such contrasting interactions could enhance the individual and collective growth of fashion designers and the fashion industry. Through a review of the literature, I came across the concept of "Co-opetition" which best captured my experience of simultaneous cooperation and competition within these networks. These experiences birthed my motivation to explore co-opetitive relationships within the Nigerian context for my Ph.D. through the Title: "*Making Sense of Co-opetition in a Post-Colonial Entrepreneurial Landscape: Nigeria's Fashion Industry.*"

The next question that shaped my self-appraisal, is: *Do I have the required skills and competencies to conduct a PhD- level research that could provide practical, policy, and academic impact?* In assessing and accounting for my abilities and competencies, I referred to previous experiences such as my MSc study of the internationalization processes of fashion designers in Nigeria, MRes (Business) study of Accelerators and SME growth in Nigeria's fashion industry, professional experience of working as a research assistant at a university. I also realized that I needed to enhance my skills and capabilities which strongly motivated me to attend several workshops, seminars, and conferences. Through this, I was confident that I had started to develop strong, collaborative engagement with the IB discipline and research communities (Aguinis, et al., 2022) which would provide a firm foundation for conducting research.

Researching the 'Self' in Relation to 'Others.'

Having gained an understanding of myself, and my research motivations/capabilities, it was also important for me to reflect on my positionality and ask the question '*How do they see the world differently from me?*' Here, I started to think of how my dual position as an 'insider' (i.e Nigerian by birth and formative experience), and 'outsider' (acquired identity as a UK-based

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researcher) could shape my research positively or negatively (Merriam et al., 2001). The insider researcher, according to Merton, (1972), is an individual who shares the characteristics, identities, roles, and experiences under study with the research participants. Alternatively, the outsider describes a researcher who is culturally neutral and views the research context objectively or who has no intimate knowledge of the group being researched prior to their entry into the group (Griffith, 1998).

My initial plan for field entry involved visiting my former associates in fashion networks located within the high-brow areas of Lagos state. This group of fashion designers enjoyed prestige and social status as contemporary elites (Odubajo & Bamidele, 2014) due to the acquisition of Western education, for instance, which led to the construction of non-elites as the *Other* (Fanon, 2008). To gain access to this group, I needed to present myself as a legitimate member of this ‘upper’ class. I made some practical decisions such as traveling with contemporary clothing, wearing a human hair wig, emphasizing my British accent when speaking with members of this social class, and emphasizing the ‘Western’ location of the university I attended. The following excerpt is drawn from my reflexive diary to illustrate the impact of this on my research:

I had been invited to attend the 3-day Fashion Finest exhibition in 2019 at the Federal Palace in Lagos State, Nigeria; a high-end hotel and leisure center in Lagos where a group of elite fashion entrepreneurs from the formal network hosted a fashion show. One of the things I observed as I interacted with this group of fashion entrepreneurs, was how willing they were to interact with me when I capitalized on my identity as an ‘outsider.’ I observed that when I approached this group of elite fashion entrepreneurs to discuss my research agenda, they were dismissive until I mentioned my affiliation to a British University.

This affiliation thus distinguished me from the non-elite group whom the contemporary elite constantly struggle consciously and unconsciously to distinguish themselves from (Bourdieu, 1984). As Bourdieu further highlights, the acquisition of ‘attributes of excellence’ is important to strengthen this distinction and these can be determined by the superior aesthetics, mannerisms, ways of walking and speaking, as well as dressing. I made a conscious effort to dress flamboyantly (such as holding a Western designer bag, speaking with a British accent, and strapping a Canon camera around my neck), which attracted their attention and interest to speak with me. By capitalizing on my position as an ‘outsider,’ I was able to recruit a sizable number of participants from this group which thoroughly enriched my research.

My experience with participants classed as ‘non-elites’ or ‘traditional elites’ who mostly operated within the informal sector, however, revealed stark differences. For this group of participants, I had assumed that my familiarity with the research context was enough to afford me access as an ‘insider.’ Yet, incidences upon entry into the field enforced a rethink and acknowledgment of the level of distance and detachment that had occurred due to my migration to England. For example, once while conversing with a participant in the informal fashion sector, the following exchange occurred:

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Participant: But, aunty, it's like you're not from here.

Researcher: How do you mean?

Participant: I mean, you're not from this side. See your skin now. This Lagos suffering is not touching you at all.

Researcher: (confused...).

In another encounter with another participant from the informal sector, the following ensued:

Participant: Aunty, please the way you are holding your bag is dangerous. I'm sure you're from abroad. That is how you abroad people hold your bags here. They will snatch it from you here if you're not careful. Please put it under your shoulder. I don't want trouble.

Clearly, as Locke (2015) submits, the issue of positionality in research is often triggered by tensions encountered by the researcher within the research context, which cause researchers to 'rethink, re-adjust, and recalibrate' their methodological decisions and choices. In this vein, I revised my plans by adopting some level of vulnerability which allowed me to share relatable experiences of growing up as a non-elite individual in Nigeria. I also allowed participants to speak in languages that they were comfortable with. Most participants within the informal sector spoke in their native languages, (e.g., Yoruba and pidgin), while participants in the formal sector, spoke in English. This language freedom equipped participants with autonomy and produced a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the researcher in the construction of meaning related to the underlying research phenomena. It also contributed to the building of trust and rapport which facilitated access to intimate knowledge that could otherwise have been missed if participants were restricted to the English language (Xian, 2008).

To truly genuinely recognize, acknowledge, and represent the complex, rather than a sanitized version of participants' reality (Xian, 2008; Wilmot & Tietz, 2023) therefore, the consideration of language and translation provides a starting point for improving methodological designs in qualitative international business research. It provides an opportunity for qualitative IB researchers to adopt methodological choices that heighten inclusion for information-rich participants. It also provides an opportunity for researchers to account for power relationships between the researcher and the researched, and how this can be negotiated over time while establishing and maintaining balanced rapport and trust (Brooks, et al., 2015) which is essential for knowledge co-creation.

'Engaged' Reflection and Representation

Having undergone a critical appraisal of myself, and self in relation to others, it was necessary for me to assess the credibility of the knowledge I had acquired through data analysis and interpretation. For this reason, I engaged in collaborative reflection with the research participants. Engaged reflection with participants was made possible through the selection of interview locations where participants felt most comfortable, to reduce the gulf between myself and the participants. Informal chats were included as a data collection technique to ease the relational dynamics. The final report of the study was provided to participants to ensure that their voices and perspectives had been accurately captured. There were instances where participants and I shared opposing perspectives. For example, during a network meeting that I

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attended, I noticed that the seating arrangement separated women from men. Also, while conversing with a male network member, I observed that he constantly stepped backward while I kept inching closer so that my audio recorder could capture his part of the conversation. I was upset about his attitude and translated that to mean disinterest in my research or disrespect because I was a woman. However, when I presented my interpretation to the participant afterward, he was surprised and told me that his reaction was in line with the Islamic religion to which he belonged. A man is not encouraged to stand too close to a woman who is not his wife.

Engaged reflection was also applied through regular engagement and interaction with the research team to uncover dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen (Milner, 2007; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). This was possible and enhanced by the strong rapport and trust that had been built between team members which greatly enhanced the research inquiry.

Reflecting on the 'Self' in Relation to 'Systems'

In researching the 'self' in relation to systems, I was conscious of the prevailing institutional structures which shaped the history, culture, and social structure of my reality, as well as those of the participants. The varied perceptions of reality held by participants in the formal and informal network motivated me to explore the pre, and post-colonial history of Nigeria as well as its prevailing formal and informal institutions. This connection between the present and the past facilitated the development of contextual explanations (Welch & Piekkari, 2017; Welch et al., 2022) that provided deeper insights.

Although Milner (2007) rightly suggests that systems (or in this case, contexts) are shaped by the prevailing history and political institutions of society, he adopts the implicit assumption of a clear delineation between inside and outside positions. The framework focuses on the researcher who assumes an outside position and suggests that through questioning an implicit lack of understanding of the context, the researcher can acknowledge the presence, and impact of such contextual structures on the meaning-making of participants, other than themselves. This assumption tends to underestimate the dynamism through which the multi-layered identities of a researcher are navigated during the research (Ryan, 2015).

For example, in researching myself in relation to the broader socio-historic and socio-cultural context, it was impossible for me to distance my experience of the effects of the imprints of colonialism on my perception of reality. I started to feel increasingly uncomfortable as I delved deeper into the colonial history of Nigeria, and with time, I could see how this started to influence my own thinking and feeling about contextual influences on participants' sensemaking. Although I could not really quantify this, I noticed that I started to feel a sort of disdain towards the contemporary elite due to having experienced their autocratic, othering, and dominating tendencies. For instance, from personal experience, I remembered that in the church restaurant where my mother had worked as a baker, non-elites like my family were not allowed to dine in the main restaurant where food was carefully and tastefully prepared. Although there was no written rule or sanction for this, it was a silent, socially approved

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segregation that went unquestioned. This also alludes to the notions of servitude and domination which caused participants to adopt a taken-for-granted and unquestioned approach to the experience of power imbalance within their co-opetitive network interactions.

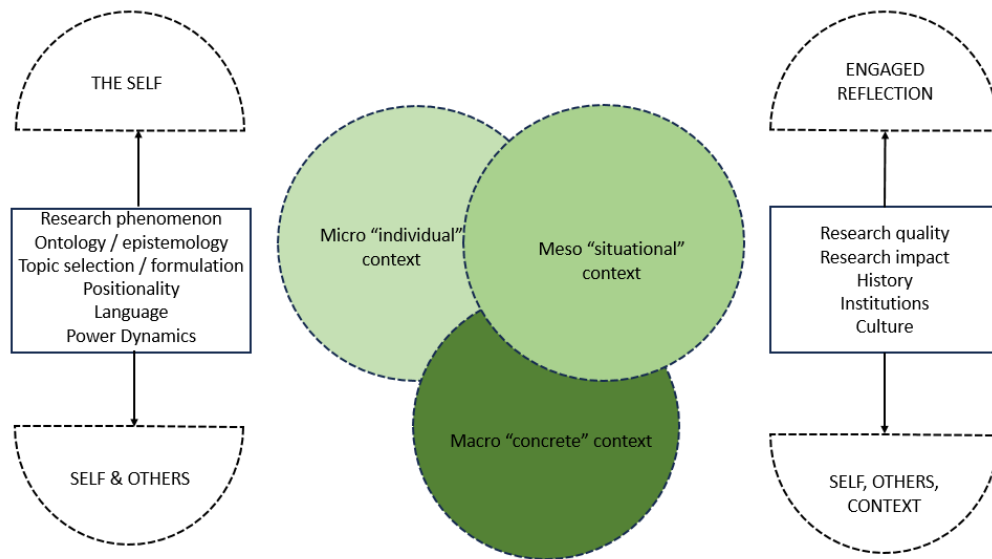
And so, when I visited contemporary elite fashion designers in their luxurious abode within the urban areas of Lagos, I was silently critical of their position and privilege. Instead, I started to think and act more warmly toward the non-elites and *othered* within the informal sector whose experience of othering and subordination was closely related to mine. For instance, I organized a free fashion workshop for participants in the informal sector to support them in updating their skills, competencies, and knowledge of new fashion trends. This brought to light the subtle ways in which personal involvement and bias could potentially shape the research inquiry. To account for this bias, therefore, I documented my daily practice and interactions with the different groups of participants to identify instances where my subjectivity was influencing the research process (Finlay, 2002) and this was discussed in the final thesis report. Through this process of thinking through and documenting my influence on my research, I was able to approach my subjectivity as an essential tool for the co-construction of knowledge, rather than a barrier (Finlay, 2002). For instance, through informal chats and conversations, I involved participants in a reflexive dialogue throughout the research inquiry to confront and clarify my interpretations (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023), which led to the uncovering of the deeper meaning of the research phenomenon.

Towards a New Typology for Contextual Reflexivity

The diagram below provides a more expansive approach by outlining three broad contextual arenas within which contextual reflexivity in qualitative IB research should occur. This framework has been developed following the experiences and decisions made throughout the design, production, and dissemination of the Ph.D. thesis upon which this paper is based. To the best of our knowledge, while this paper draws insights from Milner's (2007) framework for researcher positionality, the ERR framework is a new attempt to adopt a holistic approach to contextual reflexivity that extends focus beyond the researcher or the researcher and the researched, to several dimensions of context:

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Fig. 1 The Engaged Reflexive Researcher Framework



Source: Created by the authors

According to this framework, there are three broad contextual arenas within which reflexivity should occur: the micro 'individual' context, the meso 'situational' context, and the macro 'concrete' context.

Within the micro context, the researcher engages in an evaluation and interrogation of their underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, motivation for conducting research, skills, and potential impact. Based on the relational nature of a social constructionist philosophical position, the researcher is also advised to account for the multiple identities, roles, positions, and perceptions of reality of the researched. The application of this can begin from the pre-research stage (Finlay, 2002) where the research planning occurs. Here, the researcher could begin to examine their formulation of the research topic, skills and competencies, motivations for consulting the research, underlying assumptions, and potential impact of the research.

Within the meso 'situational' context, reflexivity occurs as a joint, collaborative activity between the researcher and the researched. Here, the researcher phenomenon should be examined alongside participants. The identification and implementation of essential practical actions such as sampling, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations and quality criteria are strengthened through reflexivity.

The macro (concrete) context refers to the external, taken-for-granted institutions that condition how a research phenomenon is perceived within a specific environment (Nguyen & Tull, 2022). It is a combination of events, actors or social entities which provide knowledge on the research phenomenon.

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Points of Departure from Other Reflexive Frameworks

Some points of departure from other typologies of reflexivity are identified below:

- In Milner's (2007) framework, the concept of 'researcher positionality' is used to ground discussions. Yet this perception is limiting because it implies that focus on the researcher, rather than the ongoing interrelationship between the researcher, and the research context which from a social-constructionist perspective, require equal attention (Finlay, 2002). For this purpose, the ERR framework adopts a more expansive concept of contextual reflexivity to acknowledge the complex and dynamic contexts within which reflexivity should occur.
- Milner's (2007) framework was designed for the researcher classed as an outsider and as such, does not attend to the challenges faced by a researcher with dual positionalities of insider. Guided by the lead researcher's experience in the field, the ERR framework acknowledges the multiple positions that a researcher may adopt and recommends constant navigation and adjustment of these multiple positions in relation to the research participants.
- Guttormsen et al.'s (2023) discussion on Bourdieu's (1989) theoretical concept of 'epistemic reflexivity' fails to acknowledge the nuanced, multidimensional, and unpredictable nature of qualitative research which can only be really understood by gaining empirical insights that shape the research process and outcome.
- Mahadevan and Moore's (2023) typology provide recommendations on how reflexivity can be incorporated into ethnographic IB research. In their arguments, they describe the researcher as the interpreter of meaning who, through inter-subjective relations with the researched, transmits or disseminates their interpretation as 'tales' or 'stories' of the field to the research audience (Mahadevan & Moore, 2023). Yet, the interpretation and dissemination of meaning would be insufficient for a social constructionist researcher whose goal is to examine the interrelationship between the researcher, the research, and the research context (Finlay, 2002). To successfully provide reflexive research, therefore, the social constructionist researcher not only looks internally, but also externally to account for how interactions, language, discourse, and shared meanings shape the research process and outcome (Finlay, 2002). In this vein, the authors recommend that researchers acknowledge their underlying epistemological positioning which would yield different outcomes for different researchers and research projects (Finlay, 2002).
- Olmos-Vega et al (2023) provide an extension of Walsh's (2003) typology of four overlapping dimensions for embedding reflexivity (personal, interpersonal, methodological, and contextual). This typology supports the arguments in this paper particularly from a social constructionist assumption of reality as co-created, where multiple perceptions of truth exist. The authors provide descriptive insights on how each dimension of reflexivity can be accounted for in the research process. However, the insights provided fail to show how their research changed or evolved through reflexivity. Additionally, discussions on reflexivity in this paper are targeted toward the health professions education (HPE) discipline. While broad commonalities may be drawn in terms of the challenges faced by qualitative researchers, IB is an

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interdisciplinary field where events are multidimensional, multidisciplinary, multicultural, and contextually embedded (Cheng, et al., 2009; Doz, 2011). As such, The ERR framework provides guidelines to enable IB researchers to acquire deep contextual knowledge, interpret contextual differences and provide a deeper understanding of IB phenomena (Doz, 2011).

- Finally, the ERR framework acknowledges the interrelated, evolving, and flexible nature of interlocking contextual arenas and does not adopt a linear approach to uncovering these. Consequently, there may exist nuanced challenges, tensions, and interlocking decisions which require a uniquely tailored approach to reflexivity within this field. For example, in reflecting on the self, the self in relation to others, or engaged, reflection, the researcher also needs to refer to the macro concrete context to understand how the cultural, institutional, and socio-historic landscape shapes how the researcher and participants experience the world.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

This paper offers insights for a broad range of qualitative IB researchers – not just those relying on a particular ontological/epistemological perspective.

In this paper, we explore the opportunities offered by contextual reflexivity for enhancing the planning, production, and dissemination of research in International Business. We argue that while qualitative research in International Business acknowledges the importance of reflexivity and the need for pluralist methodological approaches, there has been little attention paid to the multifaceted and interrelated nature of contextual arenas within which reflexivity should occur.

Based on this, we have proposed a modified version of Milner's (2007) framework to what we now term the '**Engaged Reflexive Researcher**' framework as a suitable alternative to current methodological conventions in qualitative IB research. Although relatively unknown within the IB field, this paper shows how the ERR framework can enable researchers to overcome the shortcomings in the accounting of contextual reflexivity in qualitative IB studies.

The identification of varying contextual arenas for reflexivity is the major contribution of this paper. Through an unpacking of the multifaceted context (micro, meso, and macro), we provide recommendations and examples of how researchers can apply this framework to achieve and account for their reflexive engagement with context on multiple levels to produce rich contextualization of the IB domain (Welch & Piekkari, 2017). This expansive approach to context could offer a broader understanding of factors seen, unseen, and unforeseen which shape the research inquiry (Milner, 2007). Essentially, we aim to ease the process of uncovering contextual insights that would otherwise remain concealed from the awareness of a more distant, objective researcher (Finlay, 2002).

Our second contribution relates to how reflexivity has been accounted for in qualitative IB research. Through a discussion on reflexivity, we reveal the shortcomings of conventional methodological approaches in qualitative IB research which limit the quality of theoretical insights that is generated (Reuber & & Fischer, 2021).

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This framework thus offers a more thoughtful approach to contextual reflexivity (Mahadaven, 2023; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). We hope that this framework provides a starting point for qualitative International Business researchers to address their own subjectivity and consciously navigate shifting identities, interactions, and the multifaceted context of the research phenomenon.

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