



Shaping academic identity: The influence of journal editorship on Vietnamese EFL lecturers

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates the impact of the role of journal editor on the sense of self within the academic community, focusing on Vietnamese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers. Amidst Vietnam's evolving EFL academic environment, this research aims to explore how transitioning into a journal editor role influences lecturers' professional identity, recognition, and sense of belonging within the academic community. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study utilized semi-structured interviews with two Vietnamese EFL lecturers who had recently transitioned into journal editor roles. Through thematic analysis, three key themes emerged: an enhanced sense of professional identity, increased recognition and influence within the academic community, and a shift in perceptions of role and responsibility. The findings reveal that assuming a journal editor role significantly impacts lecturers' professional identities, enhancing their sense of self and positioning within the academic community. The study highlights the role's transformative potential in elevating academics' professional trajectories and reshaping their professional identities. This study contributes to the understanding of academic identity dynamics, particularly in non-native English-speaking contexts, offering valuable insights for academic institutions, scholarly publishers, and individuals navigating the complexities of academic roles and identities.

Keywords

Academic identity, influence, journal editorship, Vietnamese EFL lecturers

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Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of academic publishing, the role of a journal editor stands out as a pivotal element (Sharma, 2016; Vuong, 2022; Wellington & Nixon, 2005). This study narrows its focus to a critical yet underexplored aspect of academic life: the impact of the journal editor role on Vietnamese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers' sense of belonging and recognition within the academic community. The unique context of Vietnam's rapidly evolving EFL sector, characterized by its increasing engagement in global academic discourse (Dang, 2011; Phan, 2021), provides a compelling backdrop for this exploration. The transition from

lecturer to journal editor in the academic realm is not just a change in job title; it represents a potential transformation in how educators perceive their place and influence within the scholarly community. This study is specifically centered on understanding this transformation. It aims to uncover the depth and nature of the impact that the editorship role has on these lecturers' sense of belonging and their recognition by peers within the academic milieu.

Focusing exclusively on one research question, this inquiry seeks to address: In what ways does the role of a journal editor impact Vietnamese EFL lecturers' sense of belonging and recognition within the academic community? The investigation is particularly relevant in understanding how the editor role can reshape an academic's self-concept and their perceived value in the eyes of their peers. Employing qualitative methodologies, this study dives into the personal narratives of Vietnamese EFL lecturers who have transitioned to journal editors. It aims to unravel how this role affects their sense of integration and acknowledgment in the broader academic landscape. By focusing on their personal experiences and perceptions, the study endeavors to shed light on the complex interrelationships between professional roles, identity formation, and community belonging in the academic world. The findings of this study are anticipated to contribute significantly to the discourse on academic identity and role transitions, providing insights that could benefit academic institutions, scholarly publishers, and educators, especially in the context of non-native English-speaking academic communities like Vietnam.

Literature Review

The Role of Journal Editors in Academia

The role of journal editors has been widely discussed in the literature. According to Glonti et al. (2019) and Matias-Guiu (2020), editors not only curate knowledge but also shape the future direction of research fields, acting as pivotal figures in defining the trajectory of academic inquiry. Building on this perspective, Horbach and Halfman (2020) argued that editors play a crucial role in maintaining the integrity and quality of academic publishing, serving as the guardians of scientific rigor. However, as Sharma (2016) noted, the editor's position often extends beyond administrative responsibilities to include mentorship and gatekeeping. This expansion of duties means that editors significantly influence the academic community's norms and standards, thereby molding the environment within which researchers operate.

Identity and Role Transition in Academic Professions

The concept of professional identity in academia has been a focus of research in recent years. Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice highlights the importance of identity in learning and participation in professional communities. Academic identities, as Ivanič (1998, 2004) suggested, are not static but evolve with changing roles and responsibilities. Research by Henkel (2005) specifically addressed the impact of role transition on academic identities, noting that shifts in roles can lead to significant changes in how academics perceive themselves and their work.

Belonging and Recognition in Academic Communities

Belonging and recognition within academic communities are crucial for the development of a scholarly identity. Lave and Wenger (1991) discussed how belonging to a community of practice is essential for identity formation, emphasizing that the social connections and shared experiences within these communities underpin individual academic identities. Recognition by peers, as Jørgensen (2012) and Hards et al. (2022) argued, is vital for academics to feel valued and integrated in their communities, highlighting the importance of peer validation in reinforcing a scholar's sense of inclusion and worth. Studies focusing on non-native English-speaking academics, such as those by Flowerdew (2007, 2012) and Canagarajah (2002, 2007), reveal challenges in gaining recognition and establishing a sense of belonging due to linguistic and cultural barriers. These studies indicate that overcoming such obstacles is critical to the full integration and acceptance of diverse voices within the global academic community.

Contextualizing the Vietnamese EFL Academic Community

In the context of Vietnam, the burgeoning EFL academic community faces unique challenges. Pham and Saltmarsh (2013) noted the pressure on Vietnamese academics to publish in international journals, often leading to a sense of alienation and a struggle for recognition. Phan (2021) and Tran-Thanh (2020) discussed the rapid growth of the EFL sector in Vietnam and its impact on academic identities, highlighting the need for more localized research in this area.

This review synthesizes existing literature on the multifaceted role of journal editors, the dynamic nature of academic identities, and the importance of belonging and recognition in scholarly communities. However, there is a noticeable gap in research specifically investigating the impact of the transition to a journal editor role on the sense of belonging and recognition, particularly within the Vietnamese EFL academic context. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how Vietnamese EFL lecturers, as journal editors, perceive changes in their sense of belonging and recognition within the academic community.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of Vietnamese EFL lecturers who have transitioned into the role of journal editors. The choice of a qualitative approach is rooted in its suitability for investigating complex, subjective experiences and social phenomena, allowing for an in-depth exploration of individual perceptions, feelings, and experiences. This study is fundamentally anchored in two theoretical frameworks: Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice and Bourdieu's (2018) concept of cultural capital. These frameworks collectively provide a comprehensive lens for examining the experiences of Vietnamese EFL lecturers transitioning into journal editor roles.

Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice is instrumental in understanding the formation and negotiation of professional identities. It posits that identity development and

learning are inherently social processes, which occur through active participation and engagement within a community of practice. In the context of this study, the academic community is conceptualized as such a community of practice. This framework suggests that the transition of these lecturers into journal editor roles could lead to significant shifts in their professional identities and alter their perceptions of belonging within the academic sphere. This theoretical perspective is crucial for exploring how the new role of a journal editor influences lecturers' sense of self and their place within the academic community.

On the other hand, Bourdieu's (2018) concept of cultural capital provides a different but complementary perspective. This concept underscores the importance of cultural knowledge, skills, and competencies, and how they are valued and recognized in a social space. Within the academic context, ascending to the role of a journal editor can be interpreted as an accumulation of cultural capital. This accumulation potentially impacts an individual's position and the recognition they receive within the academic community. Bourdieu's (2018) framework aids in understanding how the role of a journal editor might affect the lecturers' perceived status and legitimacy. It offers insights into how this role may influence their academic standing and recognition by their peers.

Together, these frameworks offer a robust theoretical foundation for the study. Wenger's (1998) theory helps explore identity and community dynamics, while Bourdieu's (2018) concept elucidates the aspects of status, recognition, and legitimacy within the academic field. This dual-theoretical approach is pivotal in comprehensively analyzing how the role transition to journal editors impacts Vietnamese EFL lecturers within their professional communities.

Participants

The participant selection for this study was meticulously designed to provide in-depth insights into the experiences of Vietnamese EFL lecturers transitioning into journal editor roles. Acknowledging the limitation of a small sample size, which may raise concerns about data saturation, two participants, representing diverse experiences and backgrounds, were chosen from two different educational institutions in Vietnam. The selection of these specific editors was driven by their unique positions in the Vietnamese academic landscape, aimed at capturing a wide array of editorial experiences while considering the contextual relevance of their roles. The first participant is a male lecturer with one year of experience as an invited editor for an academic journal. His relatively recent foray into the world of academic editing offers a fresh perspective on the initial stages of identity transformation and community integration in this role. The second participant is a female lecturer with three years of experience as a section editor. Her longer tenure in the editorial role provides a contrast to the first participant, allowing for a more longitudinal understanding of the impact such a role has on professional identity and sense of belonging in the academic community.

In conducting this research, ethical considerations were of paramount importance. Given the small number of participants and the specificity of their roles, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity was crucial to protect their identities and prevent any potential professional repercussions. Prior to conducting the interviews, informed consent was obtained from both participants, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's purpose, the nature of their

involvement, and their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any adverse consequences. The participants were assured that all collected data would be used solely for research purposes and that any identifying information would be omitted in any publications or presentations resulting from this study.

The ethical approach of this study also extended to the treatment of the data collected. All interviews were conducted in a respectful and professional manner, and the data was stored securely, accessible only to the research team. The participants were also assured that they would have the opportunity to review and comment on their interview transcripts, thereby ensuring the accuracy and integrity of the data.

Data Collection

The data collection for this study was primarily conducted through semi-structured interviews, a method that offers both direction and flexibility, allowing the participants to express their thoughts and experiences in depth. Acknowledging the concern about the limited number of participants, we emphasize that the depth and quality of individual responses are expected to mitigate issues related to data saturation to some extent. Prior to the main data collection phase, a pilot study was conducted to test and refine the interview protocol. This preliminary phase involved conducting mock interviews with two individuals who shared similar characteristics with the target participants but were not part of the actual study. Feedback from the pilot study indicated that initial questions were too broad, leading to superficial answers. Consequently, we revised our questions to be more specific, focusing on critical incidents in the participants' editorial careers and decisions that shaped their roles, enhancing the depth of the data collected. For example, the original question "What are your responsibilities as an editor?" was rephrased to "Can you walk us through a decision-making process for an editorial conflict and its impact on you?" to obtain more specific insights into their roles and challenges. Based on the feedback and observations from these pilot interviews, necessary revisions were made to the interview questions to ensure clarity, relevance, and the ability to elicit rich, detailed information.

After these revisions, the interview questions were structured to explore various aspects of the participants' experiences as journal editors. Besides the question presented previously, some others included: "Can you describe how your role as a journal editor has influenced your perception of yourself within the academic community?" and "How do you believe your peers view your role, and how has this affected your professional relationships?" These questions were designed to delve into the core aspects of the study, focusing on identity, sense of belonging, and perceived changes in status and recognition. Furthermore, the semi-structured format allowed for the exploration of unanticipated topics that emerged during the interviews, thus enriching the data set.

The interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the participants for their convenience and comfort, typically in their offices or a quiet area within their institutions. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, providing ample time for a thorough exploration of the participants' experiences. To ensure accuracy and ease of expression, the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the participants' native language. This choice not only facilitated a more natural and comfortable conversation but also ensured that nuances and subtleties in the participants' responses were accurately captured.

Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. For the purpose of analysis and reporting in this study, relevant excerpts of the transcripts were translated into English. To maintain the integrity of the participants' responses, care was taken to ensure that the translations accurately reflected the meaning and tone of the original Vietnamese responses.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews was conducted using thematic analysis, a method particularly well-suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This approach allowed for a rich and detailed exploration of the experiences and perceptions of the Vietnamese EFL lecturers who have transitioned into journal editor roles. The process began with a thorough reading of the interview transcripts to gain an initial understanding of the data. This initial reading was crucial for familiarizing the research team with the depth and breadth of the content.

Following this, the transcripts were read again, this time more analytically. During this phase, initial codes were generated. These codes were descriptive and focused on identifying specific ideas, concepts, and patterns of meaning that appeared across the data set. The coding process was both inductive and iterative, allowing themes to emerge from the data itself rather than being constrained by pre-existing theories or concepts. After coding, the next step involved searching for themes. This required collating the different codes into potential themes and gathering all the relevant coded data extracts for each potential theme. This phase was not just about clustering similar codes together but also involved a level of interpretation, where the underlying ideas and assumptions of each potential theme were considered.

Once a set of potential themes was established, they were reviewed and refined. This involved a back-and-forth process between the coded data extracts and the set of themes to ensure that the themes accurately reflected the meanings evident in the data set. Some themes were combined, while others were split or discarded, based on how well they captured the nuances of the data. The final step in the thematic analysis was defining and naming the themes. This required a detailed analysis of each theme, identifying the essence of what each theme captured about the data and determining what aspect of the participants' experiences each theme represented. The themes were then named and defined in a way that succinctly and accurately conveyed their meaning and content.

Throughout the data analysis process, rigor was maintained through constant comparison and by seeking patterns and divergences in the data. The researchers engaged in regular discussions to challenge and refine their interpretations, ensuring a comprehensive and unbiased analysis. The thematic analysis approach provided a structured yet flexible framework for understanding the complex experiences and perceptions of the participants, thereby enabling a deep and nuanced interpretation of how the role of a journal editor impacts Vietnamese EFL lecturers' sense of belonging and recognition within the academic community.

Findings

Enhanced Sense of Professional Identity

One of the prominent findings of this study was the enhancement of the participants' sense of professional identity following their transition to journal editor roles. Both participants, representing distinct experiences in their editorial journeys, shared insights that aligned with this theme. The theme was evident in the narratives of both the male lecturer with one year of experience and the female lecturer with three years in her role.

The male participant, with a shorter tenure as an editor, described a burgeoning sense of professional validation and growth. He stated, *"Since becoming an editor, I feel more recognized...like I am contributing something significant to my field."* This sentiment resonates with the theory of communities of practice, where identity is shaped through participation in community activities. His role as an editor facilitated a deeper engagement with the academic community, thus reinforcing his professional identity.

The female participant, with a longer editorial experience, provided a more nuanced perspective, indicating a substantial evolution in her professional self-perception. She expressed, *"I see myself more as a gatekeeper now, someone who upholds standards and guides others."* Her experience echoes the concept of cultural capital, where her accumulated experience and skills as an editor have not only enhanced her status within the academic community but have also reshaped her self-identity, viewing herself as a custodian of academic quality.

Both participants' experiences underscore the significance of the journal editor role in shaping and enhancing an academic's professional identity. Through the lens of the theory of communities of practice, their active participation as editors has evidently played a crucial role in the evolution of their professional selves. Concurrently, from a Bourdieuan perspective, their growing recognition and the accumulation of cultural capital through their editorial roles have further cemented their status and self-perception within the academic community. This finding highlights the transformative potential of the journal editor role in not only advancing one's career but also in fundamentally reshaping one's professional identity within the academic landscape.

Increased Recognition and Influence within the Academic Community

A significant finding of this study is the increased recognition and influence that participants experienced within their academic community as a result of their roles as journal editors. This theme was echoed in the accounts of both participants but was particularly prominent in the narrative of the female lecturer with three years of experience as a section editor.

The female participant described a noticeable shift in how her colleagues and peers perceived and interacted with her: *"I have noticed that my opinions are more sought after now, and my advice is taken more seriously."* This change in her professional interactions exemplifies the concept of cultural capital, where her role as an editor has enhanced her standing and respect within the academic community. Her accumulated experience and the authority vested in her editorial role have translated into greater recognition and influence.

The male participant, although newer to the editorial role, also noted a similar, albeit more modest, change in his professional interactions. He mentioned, “*Colleagues now often refer to my editorial experiences during discussions, which was not the case before.*” This reflects the theory of communities of practice, highlighting how his evolving role has led to a shift in his participation and the way he is perceived within the community.

Both participants’ experiences illustrate how the role of a journal editor can lead to enhanced recognition and influence within the academic community. Through the lens of the concept of cultural capital, this can be seen as an increase in cultural capital, wherein the skills, knowledge, and authority gained from the editorial role augment their academic standing. Concurrently, the theory of communities of practice provides a framework for understanding how this change in role leads to altered forms of participation and engagement within the academic community, thereby influencing their identity and how they are perceived by their peers. This finding underscores the impact of the journal editor role in not just advancing one’s professional trajectory but also in reshaping the dynamics of influence and recognition in the academic sphere.

Shift in Perceptions of Role and Responsibility

Another key finding of this study was a shift in the participants’ perceptions of their role and responsibilities within the academic community after becoming journal editors. Both participants discussed changes in how they viewed their contributions and responsibilities to the field of EFL teaching and research.

The female participant, with her longer tenure as a section editor, articulated a heightened sense of responsibility towards the academic community. She stated, “*I now feel a deeper sense of obligation to ensure the quality of research in my field. It is not just about editing articles; it is about shaping the direction of EFL research.*” This perspective aligns with the concept of cultural capital, where her role as an editor has not only increased her status but also her sense of responsibility towards the field. Her editorial position has become a significant part of her academic identity, influencing how she perceives her role in the scholarly community.

Similarly, the male participant reflected on his evolving view of his role. He expressed, “*I have started seeing myself more as a mentor and less as just a lecturer. Being an editor has broadened my view of my role in academia.*” This shift in self-perception is indicative of the theory of communities of practice, where identity is shaped through participation in community activities. His role as an editor has expanded his involvement in the academic community, leading to a redefinition of his professional identity and responsibilities.

These findings highlight a significant shift in the participants’ perceptions of their roles and responsibilities as a result of their editorial experiences. Through the lens of the concept of cultural capital, their editorial roles have enhanced their influence and reshaped their responsibilities in their academic field. Concurrently, the theory of communities of practice provides insight into how these roles have transformed their participation and identity within the academic community. This theme underscores the profound impact that the role of a journal editor can have on an academic’s self-perception and their understanding of their contributions to their field.

Discussion

The findings of this study, particularly regarding the enhanced sense of professional identity among Vietnamese EFL lecturers who transitioned into journal editor roles, resonate with and diverge from existing literature in meaningful ways, underscoring the unique contributions of this research to the field.

The enhanced sense of professional identity observed in our participants aligns with Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice, as well as existing literature that emphasizes identity evolution within professional communities (e.g., Hughes, 2013; Pennington & Richards, 2016). Similar studies have noted how academic roles influence self-perception and professional identity (Henkel, 2005; Ivanič, 1998, 2004). However, our study uniquely illustrates how this identity evolution is particularly pronounced in the context of Vietnamese EFL lecturers assuming journal editor roles. This finding contributes to the literature by highlighting the specific impact of editorial roles in non-native English-speaking academic contexts, an area that has been less explored.

The increased recognition and influence within the academic community reported by our participants further extend the understanding of Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital in an academic setting. While previous studies, such as Jæger (2011) and Maritz and Prinsloo (2015), have indicated that academic roles contribute to the accumulation of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), our study sheds light on how this process unfolds specifically for journal editors in the Vietnamese EFL community. The experiences of our participants suggest that the role of a journal editor not only confers increased status but also leads to more profound changes in how lecturers are perceived and engaged within their community. This distinction adds a new dimension to our understanding of cultural capital in academic contexts, emphasizing the role-specific nature of its accumulation and impact.

The shift in perceptions of role and responsibility reported by the participants echoes existing literature on role transitions in academia (Henkel, 2005), yet it also presents a novel perspective. Our study illustrates how these shifts are experienced by Vietnamese EFL lecturers in editor roles, highlighting a more nuanced understanding of the responsibilities and self-perception associated with such positions. The findings suggest that these shifts are not only about increased responsibilities but also involve a deeper redefinition of one's role within the academic community. This aspect has not been extensively covered in previous research, particularly in the context of EFL lecturers in Vietnam, thereby marking a significant contribution of this study to the field.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the impact of experiencing the role of a journal editor on the sense of self within the academic community, focusing specifically on Vietnamese EFL lecturers. Situated within the burgeoning landscape of Vietnam's EFL sector and the evolving role of academics in this field, the study aimed to uncover how transitioning into a journal editor role influences lecturers' professional identity, recognition, and sense of belonging within the academic community. Employing a qualitative research design, the study hinged on semi-structured interviews with two Vietnamese EFL lecturers who had transitioned into journal

editor roles. These interviews, conducted in the participants' native language of Vietnamese, were pivotal in capturing the nuanced and subjective experiences of the lecturers. The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed key insights: an enhanced sense of professional identity, increased recognition and influence within the academic community, and a shift in perceptions of role and responsibility.

The findings of this study have several implications. First, they highlight the transformative potential of the journal editor role in shaping an academic's professional identity. The enhanced sense of self and professional validation experienced by the participants underscores the role's significance beyond its administrative functions. This insight is particularly relevant for academic institutions and policymakers in understanding and supporting the professional development of lecturers. Secondly, the increased recognition and influence experienced by the participants as journal editors emphasize the importance of such roles in elevating one's standing within the academic community. This finding is significant for academics aspiring to editorial positions, as it underscores the potential of these roles to enhance one's professional trajectory and influence within the field. Finally, the shift in perceptions of role and responsibility among the participants reflects the broader impact of the editor role on an individual's understanding of their contributions to their field. This has implications for how academic roles are perceived and valued, suggesting a need for a more nuanced understanding of the various roles and their impact on an academic's career and identity.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the dynamic interplay between academic roles and professional identity, particularly in the context of non-native English-speaking countries like Vietnam. It offers valuable insights for academic institutions, scholarly publishers, and individuals navigating the complex terrains of academic roles and identity. The findings underscore the multifaceted impact of the journal editor role, not only in advancing one's career but also in fundamentally reshaping one's professional identity within the academic landscape.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Studies

This study, while offering valuable insights into the experiences of Vietnamese EFL lecturers as journal editors, is not without its limitations. Firstly, the small sample size of only two participants, although beneficial for in-depth qualitative analysis, limits the generalizability of the findings. The experiences and perceptions of these two individuals may not fully represent the broader population of Vietnamese EFL lecturers in editorial roles. Additionally, the study focused exclusively on the Vietnamese EFL context, which, while providing a unique perspective, also limits the applicability of the findings to other cultural and linguistic settings. Another limitation lies in the use of semi-structured interviews as the sole data collection method. While this approach yields rich, detailed data, it relies heavily on the participants' self-reported experiences and perceptions, which may be subject to personal biases and retrospection.

Based on these limitations, several recommendations for future research emerge. Future studies could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample size to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Including participants from various academic backgrounds and with different lengths of experience in journal editor roles could provide a more comprehensive understanding

of the impact of such roles on academic identity. Additionally, comparative studies involving lecturers from different countries or linguistic backgrounds could shed light on the cultural and contextual nuances affecting the experiences of academics in editor roles. Employing a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative measures, could also provide a more robust understanding of the phenomenon. Further research could also explore the long-term impact of journal editor roles on academic careers and identities, offering deeper insights into the evolving nature of academic professions.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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