



Multi-faceted identities of teacher assessors: A qualitative study in the Vietnamese educational context

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Abstract

Within the educational landscape of Vietnam, the professional identity of teachers when acting as assessors remains a comparatively uncharted domain and requires further explorations. Consequently, this qualitative investigation was initiated to delve deeper into the intricate identities Vietnamese teachers adopt in their capacities as assessors. Relying upon frameworks such as Constructivist Grounded Theory and Identity Theory, the study meticulously analyzed self-reported narratives from 15 tertiary lecturers based in Vietnam. Through this rigorous analysis, a spectrum of fifteen distinct identities was uncovered. These identities included “Gatekeepers of Knowledge and Competency”, “Nurturers”, “Diplomatists”, “Auditors”, “Confusian Sages”, “Innovators”, “Social Justice Advocators”, “Cultural Mediators”, “Emotional Anchors”, “Scaffolders”, “Technological Navigators”, “Lifelong Learners”, “Community Builders”, “Ethical Guardians”, and “Democratic Facilitators.” Intriguingly, these identities were not merely seen as additional layers to their professional duties; instead, they emerged as foundational components of teachers’ professional self-image. The forces molding these roles are diverse, encompassing deep-seated cultural values, prevailing educational paradigms, and personal lived experiences of educators. Unraveling these identities offers consequential implications for the broader educational sector. It underscores the imperative to holistically re-envision teacher training programs and assessment design, ensuring they resonate with the multifaceted roles educators play in steering both academic achievements and wider societal outcomes.

Keywords: Competency-based education, Professional identities, Qualitative study, Teacher assessors, Teacher roles, Vietnamese educational context.

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Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study uniquely elucidates the diverse identities of Vietnamese teacher assessors through a qualitative lens. Notably, it unveils a spectrum of fifteen distinct identities based on self-reported narratives, enriching our understanding of the Vietnamese educational landscape and spotlighting the profound implications for teacher training and assessment design.

1. Introduction

In educational settings, the role of a teacher extends far beyond that of an instructor or facilitator. One of the significant yet often understudied facets of a teacher's role is that of an assessor. While educational research has frequently delved into instructional methods, curriculum design, and classroom management (e.g., (Macalister & Nation, 2019; Wolff, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2021; Wu, Lechago, & Rettig, 2019)), less attention has been paid to the teacher's identity as an assessor. This oversight becomes particularly notable in the Vietnamese context, characterized by its historical emphasis on exam-centered education and rote learning (Abdullah, 2020). In such a landscape, the role of teachers as assessors becomes not merely functional but highly influential, affecting both educational trajectories and societal perceptions of learning.

Despite the substantial role that teachers play as assessors in the Vietnamese educational system (Nguyen, 2022), there has been limited research into how they view this part of their professional identity. Gaining insights into the types of teacher assessor identities in this particular context could have broad-reaching implications, potentially informing more equitable and effective educational practices. The primary focus of this qualitative study is to explore the types of teacher assessor identities that exist within the Vietnamese educational environment. The study revolves around a single, pivotal research question: "What types of teacher assessor identities exist in the Vietnamese educational context?"

An in-depth understanding of the types of teacher assessor identities in Vietnam could not only elucidate current assessment practices but also serve as the basis for future educational reforms. This research has the potential to pave the way for more targeted teacher training programs and influence educational policies that focus on fair and comprehensive assessment methods.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Frameworks of Teacher Identity

Identity in educational contexts is a complex, multi-faceted construct often influenced by a range of factors, including institutional norms, societal values, and individual beliefs (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Numerous theories of teacher identity have been proposed, each emphasizing different aspects such as professionalism, relational dynamics, and agency (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Stenberg, Karlsson, Pitkaniemi, & Maaranen, 2014).

The literature suggests that teacher identities are not static but evolve over time and are shaped by professional experiences and challenges (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). This concept of fluid identity underscores the need to explore teacher assessor identities, which might be influenced by a multitude of variables over a teacher's career.

2.2. Role of the Teacher as Assessor

The concept of assessment in education has been studied from various angles, encompassing formative assessments, summative assessments, and assessments for learning (Black & Wiliam, 2010; Brookhart & Nitko, 2019). Teachers engage in different types of assessments depending on the educational context, learning objectives, and institutional demands. Besides, research has indicated that teachers' perceptions of assessment often impact their instructional decisions, student interactions, and educational outcomes (Brown, 2004; Garner, Thorne, & Horn, 2017). However, limited research exists on how these perceptions shape teachers' identities as assessors, especially in non-Western contexts.

2.3. Cultural Influences on Teacher Assessor Identity

Research on comparative education has shown that teachers' assessment practices can be deeply rooted in cultural norms and expectations (Ratnam-Lim & Tan, 2015; Stobart, 2008). For example, collectivist cultures might prioritize group assessments, while individualist cultures may focus on individual performance. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has been applied to educational assessment, exploring how socio-cultural backgrounds influence teachers' assessment practices and, by extension, their identities as assessors (Bourdieu, Passeron, Melendres, & Subirats, 1977).

2.4. Vietnamese Educational Context

The Vietnamese educational system has been influenced by its colonial past and traditional Confucian values, which emphasize respect for authority and rote learning (Thanh, 2010). In contemporary Vietnam, there is an increasing shift towards global educational standards, yet the system remains heavily exam-oriented, placing teachers in a pivotal role as assessors (Ngo, 2018). While some studies have explored the challenges and reforms in Vietnamese education (Thao & Mai, 2020), there is a dearth of research specifically focusing on teacher assessor identities in this context.

In summary, while extensive literature exists on teacher identities and educational assessments separately, there is limited research at the intersection of these two areas, particularly in the Vietnamese context. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on the types of teacher assessor identities that exist in Vietnamese educational settings. By mapping out the existing literature, this review sets the stage for an empirical investigation into teacher assessor identities in Vietnam, thereby contributing to the academic discourse and offering insights that could inform educational policy and practice in the country.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

Given that the study aims to understand the nuanced and complex nature of teacher assessor identities, a qualitative approach is deemed most suitable (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It allows for in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs in the context of Vietnamese education. There are two theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, including Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) and Identity Theory (IT). This study adopted the CGT (Charmaz, 2014), which posits that both data and theories are socially constructed through interaction with participants. This approach allows for the development of a theory grounded in the data collected, while acknowledging the impact of social and cultural factors. Besides, given the focus on teacher assessor identities, the study was also influenced by IT (Stryker & Burke, 2000). This framework offers insights into how identity shapes behavior and interaction, particularly within institutional settings.

3.2. Participants

The participants in this study consist of 15 lecturers working in a higher education institution in Vietnam. These lecturers bring a wealth of expertise, coming from diverse academic fields. The composition of the participant group is intended to capture a broad range of perspectives on the role and identity of teacher assessors within the Vietnamese educational landscape.

The participant group consists of 8 males and 7 females, offering a balanced gender perspective for the study. The average age of the participants is 42.8 years, with an average teaching experience of 17 years. This level of professional experience is expected to provide rich, nuanced insights into the complex role of the teacher as an assessor. Of the 15 lecturers, 11 hold Ph.D. degrees, while 4 are currently Ph.D. candidates. This high level of academic achievement indicates a depth of subject matter expertise, as well as an understanding of research methodologies, both of which are likely to contribute to the quality of the data collected. The participants represent a range of academic disciplines, encompassing the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and professional studies. This diversity is intended to offer a comprehensive view of teacher assessor identities across different fields, thereby capturing the multi-disciplinary nature of higher education in Vietnam.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a wide range of academic fields and teaching experience were represented. While the primary criteria were their roles as lecturers and assessors in a higher education institution, considerations were also made to ensure diversity in terms of gender, age, and academic qualifications.

3.3. Data Collection

The primary method of data collection for this study is semi-structured interviews, chosen for their ability to provide in-depth, nuanced insights into the identities of teacher assessors in the Vietnamese higher education context (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Prior to the main data collection phase, a pilot study was conducted to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the interview protocol. This involved conducting interviews with three lecturers who met the study's participant criteria but were not part of the main study. Feedback from the pilot study was used to revise and refine the interview questions to ensure their relevance and clarity. Based on feedback from the pilot study, some questions were revised for clarity, and additional questions were added to address areas that were initially overlooked. The finalized list of questions was designed to guide a conversation that would last between 45 to 60 minutes with each participant. The interview protocol consisted of a series of open-ended questions designed to explore various facets of teacher assessor identity. Some of the preliminary questions included: "Can you describe your experience and approach to academic assessment?", "How do you perceive your role as an assessor in relation to your other roles as a teacher?", "What influences, if any, do you believe your cultural background has on your assessment practices?", "How has your approach to assessment evolved over the years?", "What challenges do you face in your role as an assessor, particularly in the Vietnamese context?", and "How do institutional policies and norms affect your assessment practices?" The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to allow participants to express themselves more freely and to ensure cultural nuances were captured. The use of the native language was also aimed at establishing rapport and trust between the researcher and the participants. Interviews were conducted in a quiet, comfortable setting to minimize distractions and were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants for later transcription and analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

The analysis of data in this qualitative study aimed to generate a nuanced understanding of teacher assessor identities in the Vietnamese higher education context. First, all recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Given that the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, they were also translated into English to facilitate the analysis process. To maintain the integrity and nuances of the data, both the Vietnamese and English versions were cross-referenced throughout the analysis. Initial engagement with the data involved reading through all transcriptions multiple times to achieve an overarching grasp of the content. Highlighting, memoing, and making preliminary notes were part of this initial review process. In line with the principles of CGT, open coding was employed as the first level of analysis. During this stage, data were segmented into discrete parts and coded to identify primary patterns and themes. This was a crucial step in moving from specific observations to broader generalizations.

Following open coding, axial coding was used to identify relationships between the coded data. This involved categorizing the open codes into higher-level themes and establishing links between them. The aim was to start constructing a coherent picture from the fragmented data. Selective coding involved integrating and refining the categories developed during axial coding. At this point, a central narrative or "story" began to emerge, which was then aligned with the theoretical frameworks—CGT and IT—to build a grounded theory around teacher assessor identities in Vietnam.

For enhanced validity, the study employed data triangulation by cross-referencing findings with existing literature and feedback from participants. This helped in affirming the study's findings and ensuring they were well-

grounded. As an additional measure for ensuring validity, member checking was used. Summaries of the findings were sent to participants for review and feedback. This step served to validate that the researchers' interpretations aligned with the participants' experiences and viewpoints. Strict confidentiality was maintained during the analysis process, and all data were stored securely. Identifiable information was anonymized during transcription and coding to safeguard the identities of the participants.

4. Findings and Discussion

The study was focused solely on understanding the identities that teachers embody when they assume the role of assessors in the Vietnamese higher education context. Interviews with 15 lecturers across various fields of study yielded multiple, layered identities that are key to understanding this specific role.

4.1. *The Gatekeepers of Knowledge and Competency Identity*

One dominant theme was that of teacher assessors as “gatekeepers” of knowledge and competency, a sentiment expressed by 13 out of 15 participants ($n=13$). Participant 4 noted, “When I assume the role of an assessor, I feel like a gatekeeper, ensuring that students meet the standard before progressing.” Participant 10 added, “As an assessor, I uphold the quality of education by setting and enforcing rigorous standards.”

The concept of teachers as “gatekeepers” of knowledge and competency is not entirely new and finds resonance with previous research. For instance, [Novak and Jones \(2021\)](#) pointed out that teachers often act as gatekeepers in shaping curriculum and educational standards, which directly or indirectly impacts how students progress through educational systems. However, this current study makes a significant addition by delving deeper into the psychological and sociological dimensions of this identity, utilizing frameworks like CGT and IT. One of the key differences between this study and earlier research is the focus on the teacher's own perception of their role as a gatekeeper. Most previous studies were largely evaluative and considered this role from an institutional or societal perspective ([Butera et al., 2021](#)). These studies frequently looked at the macro impacts of this gatekeeping role, such as its influence on curriculum standards or educational policy. This current study shifts the lens to a more micro level, exploring how the ‘gatekeeper’ identity becomes part of the teacher's professional self-concept. This study found that this identity is not merely an imposition from above but is often voluntarily adopted and internalized by teachers, influenced by their individual experiences and the broader educational ecosystem. Another distinction is the cultural context; this study is situated in the Vietnamese educational landscape, which adds another layer of nuance to the ‘gatekeeper’ role. Earlier studies, often conducted in Western settings (e.g., [Blanchard & Muller, 2015](#); [Manan, Channa, David, & Amin, 2021](#)), might not have accounted for cultural elements that are unique to Vietnamese or similar educational systems, where the teacher often carries an additional burden of moral and ethical responsibility.

4.2. *The Nurturer Identity*

Nine of 15 participants ($n=9$) also spoke about a “nurturer” identity, emphasizing the nurturing aspects of assessment. Participant 6 expressed, “Assessment is not just about grading; it is about nurturing growth.” Participant 12 concurred, stating, “I see myself as a nurturer when I assess. It is my chance to guide students toward improvement.”

The idea of the teacher as a “nurturer” has been explored in various research studies, albeit through different terminologies and theoretical frameworks. For example, the seminal work by [Noddings \(2012\)](#) on the ‘ethic of care’ proposes that teaching is essentially an act of caring, a notion that aligns well with our finding of teachers identifying as nurturers. Similarly, studies in educational psychology, such as those focusing on Self-Determination Theory ([Ryan & Deci, 2000](#)), have emphasized the critical role teachers play in fostering students' autonomy and competence, which is congruent with nurturing. One notable point of divergence between this current study and previous research is the context of assessment. The nurturing role of teachers is often discussed in the literature in broader pedagogical terms, such as classroom interaction ([Boorn, Hopkins Dunn, & Page, 2010](#)), curriculum design ([Cheng, 2014](#)), or emotional support ([Sharp, 2014](#)). This study adds a new dimension by specifically linking this nurturing identity to the process of assessment. According to the findings framed by CGT, teachers see assessment not merely as a mechanism for grading but as an opportunity for fostering relational and developmental growth in students. Moreover, this research, interpreted through IT, emphasizes that this nurturing role is integral to teachers' professional identity. While other studies have discussed teachers' caring or supportive roles, they have not always considered how deeply this role is internalized as part of the professional self-concept of teachers. The difference is subtle but crucial: in this current study, being a nurturer is not an additional task or external expectation but a core facet of what it means to be a teacher for the participants. Similar to the ‘gatekeeper’ identity, this investigation of the ‘nurturer’ identity also adds cultural specificity, considering that the research is grounded in the Vietnamese context. This adds another layer of complexity and could prompt future research to explore how cultural norms and expectations influence the adoption of nurturing roles among teachers.

4.3. *The Diplomat Identity*

Another identity that surfaced was that of a “diplomat,” brought up by 7 out of 15 participants ($n=7$). Participant 2 said, “Balancing fairness and understanding individual needs makes me feel like a diplomat.” Participant 14 added, “The diplomatic part of assessment comes when you have to navigate parental expectations and institutional pressures.”

The idea of teachers embodying a “diplomat” identity has not been extensively addressed in prior educational research, but it does echo existing theories and discussions about teachers navigating complex social systems and stakeholder expectations. For example, research on “emotional labor” in teaching ([Hochschild, 1983](#); [Kariou, Koutsimani, Montgomery, & Lainidi, 2021](#); [Sutton & Wheatley, 2003](#)) has touched upon how teachers manage their own emotions and those of others (e.g., students, parents, administrators) to create a functional and conducive learning environment. This could be seen as a form of diplomatic labor, though not explicitly termed as such. The concept of teachers as diplomats also aligns with studies exploring the professional ethics and responsibilities of

educators, which often involve mediating between various interests (Strike, 1990; Yildiz & Dayan, 2022). However, these discussions typically do not explore the identity implications or how teachers themselves conceptualize this role. The current study contributes to the literature by explicitly naming and describing the ‘diplomat’ identity within the specific context of educational assessment. Through the lens of CGT, the findings show that the diplomat role is not just an external imposition but a socially constructed identity that teachers adopt as they negotiate complex pressures like institutional standards, parental expectations, and individual student needs. Moreover, this study uniquely positions the ‘diplomat’ identity within IT as a segmented part of the teachers’ professional role, which suggests that teachers modulate this identity according to specific environmental pressures. Unlike the ‘gatekeeper’ and ‘nurturer’ roles, which were described as more core to teachers’ sense of professional self, the diplomat role seems to be more situational, activated in response to particular external conditions.

4.4. The Auditor Identity

Six participants (n=6) described their role as akin to an “auditor,” particularly emphasizing the responsibility for ensuring procedural integrity in the assessment process. Participant 7 expressed, “I feel like an auditor, making sure that every step of the assessment is transparent and fair.” Participant 15 added, “As an assessor, it is my role to scrutinize, much like an auditor would, to ensure that educational standards are consistently met.”

The concept of teachers embodying an “auditor” identity aligns in some ways with the existing literature on accountability and fairness in educational assessment. Previous research has delved into the importance of procedural integrity and fairness in both formative and summative assessments (Dixson & Worrell, 2016; Shepard, 2000; Stobart, 2008). Yet, these discussions have typically focused on the systemic level or the construction of the assessments themselves, rather than considering how teachers internalize this aspect of their role. The current findings introduce a new perspective by identifying the ‘auditor’ identity that some teachers adopt, particularly within the context of assessment. According to CGT, this role is socially constructed around the imperative for procedural fairness and transparency. In terms of IT, the ‘auditor’ identity is perceived by teachers as a key part of their professional responsibilities, stressing their commitment to ensuring that educational and ethical standards are consistently upheld during assessments. Compared to previously researched identities like ‘gatekeeper,’ ‘nurturer,’ and ‘diplomat,’ the ‘auditor’ identity brings in a unique focus on scrutinizing and validating the assessment process itself, rather than primarily focusing on student outcomes, relational dynamics, or external pressures. This identity implies a heightened sense of responsibility for the ‘how’ of assessment, ensuring that the procedures align with institutional and ethical norms.

4.5. The Confucian Sage Identity

Five participants (n=5) reflected an identity deeply rooted in the Confucian heritage of Vietnamese culture, which they referred to as the “Confucian Sage.” Participant 3 shared, “In our culture, a teacher has always been more than just an instructor. They are expected to be wise and moral figures. When I assess, I feel this pressure to be a Confucian Sage—judging not just knowledge but character.” Participant 9 added, “The role of a teacher in Vietnam has always been to shape morals alongside intellect. I see my role as an assessor as part of that ancient tradition.”

The emergence of a “Confucian Sage” identity among Vietnamese teachers provides a culturally specific lens to understand the roles that educators assume, adding to a rich tapestry of teacher identities delineated in existing literature. Previous studies have often focused on teacher identities that are prevalent in Western educational settings, such as the “facilitator” (Finn & Schrod, 2016) or the “reflective practitioner” (Tonna, Bjerkholt, & Holland, 2017). These identities, although encompassing moral and ethical dimensions, generally prioritize pedagogical methods and student-centered approaches. In contrast, the “Confucian Sage” identity rooted in Vietnamese culture highlights the teacher’s role in shaping not just the intellect but also the moral character of students (Le Ha, McPherron, & Van Que, 2013). This aligns with Confucian educational philosophy, where the educator is a moral exemplar (Kim, 2017). According to CGT, this identity is socially constructed, but it is uniquely influenced by the cultural and historical background of Vietnam. From the standpoint of IT, the “Confucian Sage” role is a complex one that may co-exist or even conflict with other identities like ‘auditor’ or ‘gatekeeper,’ given its broader scope that transcends mere academic evaluation. The “Confucian Sage” identity raises questions about how teachers navigate these complex, sometimes conflicting roles, particularly in a global educational landscape where standardization and accountability are emphasized.

4.6. The Innovator Identity

Four participants (n=4) described themselves as “Innovators,” emphasizing the need to adapt and evolve assessment methods to better cater to the learning needs of students. Participant 11 explained, “As an assessor, I also see myself as an innovator, constantly looking for ways to make assessments more meaningful and effective.” Participant 5 added, “Innovation in assessment is crucial; it is not just about following a rubric but about capturing the full scope of a student’s abilities.”

The “Innovator” identity adds a dynamic layer to our understanding of teacher identities, resonating with but also diverging from previous literature on this topic. Research on teacher identities has often discussed the roles of ‘facilitator,’ ‘curator,’ or ‘coach,’ which emphasize guiding student learning rather than dictating it (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000). However, these identities rarely delve into the aspect of active adaptation and evolution in the realm of assessment that the “Innovator” identity brings into focus. While the identities like ‘gatekeeper’ or ‘auditor’ often emphasize adherence to pre-existing standards and protocols, the “Innovator” identity suggests a teacher who is not just a passive implementer of assessments but an active designer, constantly refining and adapting methods to better capture student learning. According to CGT, this identity arises in response to changing educational landscapes, reflecting an agile mindset. From the perspective of IT, this role is not merely an added layer to a teacher’s professional self-concept but could be central to it, especially for those who view teaching as a dynamic, evolving profession. Teachers with this identity are likely to seek ongoing professional development and be more open to pedagogical changes, including the integration of technology in assessment.

4.7. The Social Justice Advocate Identity

Three participants (n=3) saw their roles as “Social Justice Advocates,” highlighting the ethical responsibility to ensure fair and equitable assessments. Participant 8 stated, “My role as an assessor is also to be a social justice advocate, making sure that assessments are free from bias and provide equal opportunities for everyone.” Participant 13 echoed this sentiment: “Assessment is more than just grading; it’s also about leveling the playing field for all students.”

The emergence of the “Social Justice Advocate” identity presents an intriguing angle to the evolving understanding of teacher identities in the context of educational assessment. Prior research has touched upon teachers as moral agents or ethicists (Carr, 2007; Rosenberg, 2015), focusing on general ethical considerations in educational practice. However, the specific framing of the teacher as a “Social Justice Advocate” in the context of assessment is less commonly explored. This identity places an additional layer of ethical obligation upon the teacher, aligning their role not only with institutional guidelines but also with broader societal values of equity and social justice. According to CGT, this suggests some teachers are explicitly aware of and responsive to wider systemic issues of inequality that can manifest in educational settings, potentially influenced by current social dialogues on justice and equality. From an IT perspective, this role could significantly overlap with personal values, thus becoming a deeply ingrained part of the teacher’s professional identity. The “Social Justice Advocate” identity highlights a proactive approach towards equality and could represent a counterbalance to identities like ‘gatekeeper’ and ‘auditor,’ which might inadvertently perpetuate existing inequalities if not carefully managed.

4.8. The Cultural Mediator Identity

Two participants (n=2) described their assessor role as being a “Cultural Mediator,” highlighting the navigation between local cultural norms and global educational standards. Participant 1 mentioned, “In a globalized world, I find myself serving as a bridge between our traditional ways of teaching and the modern, more globalized approaches in assessment.” Participant 15 concurred, “Being a Cultural Mediator is crucial. I aim to reconcile the expectations of our students, who are deeply rooted in Vietnamese culture, with international standards.”

The identity of “Cultural Mediator” enriches the already complex tapestry of roles that teachers assume, particularly in multicultural or non-western educational settings. Earlier research has explored the role of teachers in the process of cultural transmission and adaptation (Gay, 2002; Nieto, 2015). However, those studies often look at the role of teachers in facilitating students’ cultural adaptation rather than the teachers themselves actively navigating between different cultural paradigms in their professional roles. The “Cultural Mediator” identity, through the lens of CGT, suggests that teachers are increasingly aware of the transnational factors affecting education and see themselves as agents who can harmonize local traditions with global educational standards. From an IT viewpoint, this is a complex role that requires teachers to stretch their professional identities to encompass skills usually associated with intercultural competency. This identity can be particularly relevant in the modern age of globalization, where teachers are tasked with preparing students to be global citizens while preserving cultural identities. The emergence of this identity suggests a nuanced perspective that blends traditional and modern, local and international, necessitating a type of cultural fluency that goes beyond mere knowledge transmission.

4.9. The Emotional Anchor Identity

Three participants (n=3) emphasized their role as an “Emotional Anchor” during the assessment process. Participant 2 stated, “Assessment can be stressful for students. I see my role as an assessor as also being an emotional anchor, offering a sense of stability during this high-stakes process.” Participant 7 added, “I consider emotional intelligence a key part of assessment. I become an Emotional Anchor to guide students through this journey.”

The concept of teachers serving as an “Emotional Anchor” has emerged as an interesting addition to the body of literature on teachers’ multiple identities. Prior research has largely focused on teachers as facilitators of academic knowledge and skills (Amin, 2016; Su & Wang, 2022), overlooking the emotional labor that often accompanies teaching roles. Recent trends in educational research have started to explore the emotional aspects of teaching (Pastore & Luder, 2021), but the “Emotional Anchor” identity presents a unique focus on the high-stakes, emotionally charged period of assessment. According to CGT, the emergence of this identity suggests that teachers view emotional support as an integral part of the assessment process, possibly affecting both how they conduct assessments and how students experience them. From the IT perspective, this role adds an emotional dimension to teachers’ professional self-concept, making them not just facilitators of cognitive development but also emotional guides during challenging academic events. As the education landscape evolves, acknowledging the complexity of teachers’ roles is critical for training and professional development programs. Understanding the role of an “Emotional Anchor” can provide fresh insights into how emotional support could be systematically incorporated into assessment strategies.

4.10. The Scaffolder Identity

Three participants (n=3) identified themselves as “Scaffolders,” helping students build upon their existing knowledge during assessments. Participant 9 stated, “Assessments should not be pitfalls; they should be scaffolds. My role is to help students build upon what they already know.” Participant 5 added, “I design assessments as a scaffolding process, as stepping stones for students to reach higher.”

The notion of teachers as “Scaffolders” adds a developmental dimension to our understanding of teachers’ identities, and it aligns with Vygotsky and Cole (1978) theory of scaffolding as an instructional strategy. Previous studies have predominantly focused on scaffolding within classroom interactions (Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010), often ignoring how it applies to assessments. The “Scaffolder” identity fills this gap by extending the constructivist approach to the realm of student assessments. CGT posits that this identity showcases the teachers’ role as facilitators of learning, using assessments not merely as measurement tools but as constructivist devices to help students develop higher-level understanding. This implies a broader role for assessments in the educational process, beyond mere judgment of competence. From the lens of IT, this suggests that teachers who identify as “Scaffolders” are likely to align their teaching and assessment practices with developmental and constructivist

philosophies. This also marks a departure from traditional views of assessment as a summative process, highlighting its formative potentials.

4.11. The Technological Navigator Identity

Three participants (n=3) talked about being a “Technological Navigator,” especially pertinent in the age of digital education. Participant 11 said, “With more exams moving online, I consider myself a technological navigator, guiding students through this new landscape.” Participant 8 added, “I find myself constantly learning new tech tools to improve my assessment strategies. I navigate, so my students can too.”

The “Technological Navigator” identity contributes a modern perspective to existing literature on teacher identity, particularly in the context of an increasingly digital educational landscape. Previous studies on teacher identity have often overlooked the role of technology, focusing more on traditional teaching paradigms (Beijaard et al., 2004; Olsen, 2016). With the advent of new educational technologies and e-learning platforms, the identity of teachers as “Technological Navigators” gains prominence. In terms of CGT, this identity demonstrates teachers’ capacity for adaptability and lifelong learning, key traits for navigating the digital shift in education. It also shows that teachers are not just passive recipients of technological change but active navigators, making conscious choices about how to integrate technology into their assessment strategies. According to IT, the emergence of this identity highlights an evolving facet of professional roles in education. Teachers who see themselves as “Technological Navigators” are likely committed to ongoing professional development in technology, aligning their practices with the needs and expectations of 21st-century learners.

4.12. The Lifelong Learner Identity

Two participants (n=2) specifically mentioned their role as “Lifelong Learners,” especially while conducting assessments. Participant 4 mentioned, “I do not just assess to evaluate my students; I also learn from them. I consider myself a lifelong learner during this process.” Participant 12 echoed, “Every assessment is a new learning opportunity for me, as much as it is for my students.”

The “Lifelong Learner” identity adds a dynamic layer to the discussion on teacher identities in assessment, emphasizing the bidirectional nature of learning that happens during the assessment process. Prior studies have often focused on the teacher as the provider and facilitator of knowledge, but less often as a co-participant in the learning process (Bulte, Betts, Garner, & Durning, 2007; Lasky, 2005; Wegner & Nückles, 2015). The idea of teachers as “Lifelong Learners” situates them not just as experts or disseminators of knowledge but also as active learners who grow professionally and personally through the assessment process. From a CGT perspective, this identity underscores the relational and reciprocal aspects of assessment. It supports the idea that the act of assessing can be a learning experience not only for the student but also for the teacher. According to IT, the “Lifelong Learner” identity also implies a commitment to ongoing professional development and a willingness to adapt and evolve in pedagogical practices.

4.13. The Community Builder Identity

Two participants (n=2) emphasized their role in creating a sense of community in the classroom through assessments. Participant 6 said, “As an assessor, I also see myself as a community builder. I design assessments that can encourage collaboration and community building among the students.” Participant 14 added, “In a way, how I assess impacts the classroom atmosphere. I see myself as setting the tone for a learning community.”

The “Community Builder” identity offers a fresh perspective on the multidimensional role of teachers in the context of assessment. It aligns with previous research that has explored the role of teachers in fostering a positive classroom environment and encouraging student engagement (Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, 2009; Pedler, Hudson, & Yeigh, 2020). While much of the extant literature has focused on how teachers manage and disseminate content (Perrotta, 2013), the “Community Builder” identity suggests that the act of assessment itself can be a tool for fostering a sense of community among students. Through the lens of CGT, this identity is viewed as a product of the social and cultural context within which the teacher operates. It signifies an attempt to bring about not just individual learning but collective growth and cohesion. According to IT, this identity could co-exist, complement, or even conflict with other professional identities that a teacher may hold. For instance, it may harmonize with the “Nurturer” identity but could potentially conflict with the “Auditor” identity if strict compliance to procedural integrity is perceived as inhibiting the building of a classroom community.

4.14. The Ethical Guardian Identity

Two participants (n=2) emphasized their role as “Ethical Guardians,” responsible for maintaining the moral integrity of the assessment process. Participant 10 declared, “My duty is not just about giving grades; it is about ensuring that the process is ethical and honest.” Participant 3 concurred, “As an assessor, I see myself as an ethical guardian, committed to eliminating all kinds of biases and upholding academic integrity.”

The “Ethical Guardian” identity resonates with the increasing emphasis on ethics and integrity in educational literature, specifically in the context of assessment (Cizek, 2003; Garg & Goel, 2022; Gudiño Paredes, Jasso Peña, & de La Fuente Alcazar, 2021). Previously, discussions around ethical considerations often appeared in isolation, concentrated on specific issues such as plagiarism or biased evaluation (Ison, 2018; Yeo & Chien, 2007). This identity, however, holistically integrates the ethical dimension into the teacher-assessor role, framing it as a core part of professional responsibility. In terms of CGT, the emergence of the “Ethical Guardian” identity is significant because it reflects the teachers’ adaptive responses to the complexities of modern educational environments, where issues like academic dishonesty are of growing concern. According to IT, this particular role marks a moral commitment that could potentially intersect or even conflict with other roles the teacher holds. For instance, while it may align well with the “Social Justice Advocate” identity in striving for fairness, it could be at odds with the “Innovator” identity if new assessment methods are perceived as less secure or more susceptible to dishonesty.

4.15. The Democratic Facilitator Identity

Two participants (n=2) identified themselves as “Democratic Facilitators,” giving students a voice in the assessment process. Participant 13 mentioned, “I always incorporate some form of student feedback in my assessments. It is not just me assessing them; they have a say too.” Participant 15 stated, “In my role, I see the importance of democracy in education. I aim to make assessments a two-way street.”

The emergence of the “Democratic Facilitator” identity ties into a broader pedagogical discourse that advocates for student-centered learning and participatory approaches to education. Previous studies have explored the role of democratic processes in classrooms, primarily focusing on the curriculum and classroom management (Apple & Beane, 2007; Sanahuja, Moliner, & Moliner, 2020). However, the “Democratic Facilitator” identity extends this discussion to the realm of assessment, indicating a shift in teachers’ perception of their roles as not just evaluators but also as facilitators of a democratic dialogue around evaluation. Within the frameworks of CGT and IT, this identity aligns closely with educational philosophies that emphasize participatory practices and shared authority. Teachers adopting this identity would likely resonate with Freirean pedagogy, which sees education as a practice of freedom and calls for a shift from the “banking concept of education” to problem-solving education (Freire, 2015).

5. Conclusion

The study reveals a multifaceted tapestry of identities that teacher assessors in Vietnamese educational settings navigate. These identities range from being the “Gatekeepers of Knowledge and Competency” to “Democratic Facilitators,” indicating that the role of a teacher assessor is complex, nuanced, and deeply influenced by individual, cultural, and institutional factors. The most dominant identity that emerged was that of teacher assessors as “gatekeepers,” highlighting the pivotal role teachers play in upholding educational standards. This finding is in line with the larger global discourse around the quality of education and the vital position that teachers occupy in it. However, the findings also signal that teachers do not view themselves solely as enforcers of standards. They adopt roles as “Nurturers,” “Diplomats,” “Auditors,” and “Innovators,” among others. These identities often co-exist, sometimes even conflict, pointing to the dynamism and fluidity of the teacher’s professional self-concept.

Unique to this context is the “Confucian Sage” identity, underscoring the distinct socio-cultural influences that shape how teachers view their roles. This specific identity reveals that teachers in Vietnam negotiate not just academic but also ethical dimensions, indicating that local traditions continue to have a strong impact on contemporary educational practices. Another remarkable finding is the emergence of identities that are inherently forward-looking and adaptive, such as the “Innovator” and the “Technological Navigator.” These identities suggest that teachers are not passive recipients of change but active agents who are willing to adapt and evolve. Of note is the existence of social-justice oriented identities like the “Social Justice Advocate” and the “Democratic Facilitator.” These identities reflect a growing awareness among educators about the broader societal implications of assessments, adding another layer of complexity to their roles.

The study’s findings, interpreted through CGT and IT, contribute significantly to the existing literature on teacher identities in assessment contexts. They reveal that identity is not monolithic but a composite of various roles that are continually being negotiated. This multiplicity in identities emphasizes the importance of providing teachers with professional development opportunities that are cognizant of this complexity, equipping them to be effective in their multifarious roles.

6. Implications

Understanding that teachers view themselves in multiple roles—such as gatekeepers, nurturers, diplomats, and innovators—has significant implications for professional development programs. Tailoring these programs to acknowledge and enhance these different identities could be beneficial. For instance, modules could be developed to focus on ethical assessment practices, innovative methods, and emotional intelligence. The emergence of roles like the “Nurturer” and “Scaffolder” further indicates that assessments should be developmentally appropriate and more geared towards building student competencies rather than merely evaluating them. Cultural considerations also come into play, with roles like the “Cultural Mediator” and the “Confucian Sage” underscoring the need for culturally sensitive curriculum and assessment frameworks. In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, the identity of the teacher as a “Technological Navigator” emphasizes the need for ongoing professional development in the use of educational technology, especially as online assessments become more prevalent. Lastly, the role of the “Democratic Facilitator” suggests that involving students in the assessment process could be beneficial, possibly through formative feedback mechanisms or even co-designing assessment criteria.

The diversity of assessor identities among teachers necessitates a nuanced approach to policy formation and educational reform. A one-size-fits-all approach to either assessment design or teacher evaluation would be insufficient and could lead to professional dissonance. Importantly, the identity of the teacher as a “Social Justice Advocate” brings to light the imperative for policies that explicitly address fairness and equity in educational assessments. Ensuring that assessments are culturally, socially, and gender-neutral becomes a policy priority. Additionally, the “Emotional Anchor” identity points towards a need for institutions to provide emotional support systems for both students and teachers, particularly during the stressful period of assessments. Policymakers must also grapple with the challenges of balancing global educational standards with local cultural norms and values, particularly in settings like Vietnam where this balance is a notable aspect of the teacher’s professional identity.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes valuable insights to existing literature. The multi-dimensional view of teacher identities as assessors can enrich frameworks like CGT and IT, especially within educational contexts. The roles teachers adopt are shown to be complex and shaped by a myriad of factors, adding depth and nuance to these theories. Furthermore, the influence of culture, as seen through identities like the “Confucian Sage,” offers a unique lens for future research in cultural studies in education. Additionally, the emergence of ethical considerations, especially through the identity of the “Ethical Guardian,” suggests that this research can contribute to the ongoing academic discourse on ethics in education, particularly concerning issues of academic integrity and equitable assessment.

7. Limitations and Recommendations for Further Studies

While this study provides valuable insights into teachers' multifaceted roles as assessors in Vietnam, there are several limitations to consider. First, the sample size and geographic scope were relatively limited, focusing on teachers in specific regions of Vietnam, which may not fully capture the diversity of assessor identities across the country or in different educational settings. Second, the study primarily relied on self-reported data, which might be subject to social desirability bias. The teachers participating in the study could have idealized their roles or downplayed conflicts or challenges they face in assessments. Finally, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow for tracking changes in teachers' perceptions and practices over time, making it difficult to establish causal relationships or account for the influence of external factors like policy changes or technological advancements.

Given these limitations, future research could aim to diversify the sample by including teachers from various educational levels, geographic regions, and even different countries to get a more comprehensive view of assessor identities. Longitudinal studies could be beneficial for tracking how teacher identities evolve over time and in response to shifts in educational policy or technology. Researchers should also consider employing triangulation methods, using interviews, classroom observations, and documentary evidence alongside self-reported surveys, to build a more robust and nuanced understanding of the roles teachers adopt in assessments. This could also mitigate the limitations tied to social desirability bias. Moreover, future studies could focus on the impact of specific roles like the "Social Justice Advocate" or "Technological Navigator" on actual assessment outcomes, thereby providing more targeted recommendations for policy and practice.

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