



NAVIGATING DUAL ROLES: NARRATIVES OF ENGLISH MAJORED SENIORS BALANCING PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE AND THESIS WRITING AT TAY DO UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM

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Abstract:

As graduation approaches, students often have to simultaneously fulfill practicum obligations and write their dissertations, leading to increased pressure and role conflict. This study aims to examine how English- majored senior experience and manage their dual roles in a daily context. Using a qualitative narrative approach, 6 English-majored Seniors participated in semi-structured interviews and kept reflection journals during the period of managing these two burdens. The collected data were analyzed thematically to reveal common experiences and individual differences. The analysis demonstrated that managing dual roles is not a skill that can be mastered in a short period but rather a developmental process. They are influenced by emotions, health, personal expectations, and perceptions. Participants reported difficulties encountered, moments of effective adaptation coexisting with feelings of overload and burnout. The research findings also highlight the role of self-awareness and social network support in helping students rebuild their sense of autonomy. By focusing on students' real-world experiences, this study provides insights into the psychological and practical challenges of managing dual roles, while emphasizing the need for more flexible and empathetic institutional support systems.

Keywords: dual roles, practicum experience, thesis writing

1. Introduction

1.1. Rationale

The practicum and the bachelor's thesis are two important tasks in the English-major curriculum, intended to strengthen students' academic competence and professional readiness. However, despite having English proficiency as a competitive advantage in the labor market, many graduates are not systematically prepared for a specific career

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pathway. Consequently, they often enter occupations such as teaching or tourism-related positions without formal professional training aligned with these roles.

Phuong *et al.* (2023) pointed out in their research of English students in Vietnam that many students face unclear career paths because of a lack of targeted professional training. Similarly, Nguyen & Doan (2021) emphasized that English majors often struggle with employability because their academic programs do not align closely with specific job requirements.

Classroom learning and professional practice are connected by the internship process, as it provides students with invaluable practical experience and knowledge of their chosen field (Gault *et al.*, 2010). In addition, independent thinking and in-depth research skills are developed during the process of writing a thesis, as well as preparing students for future work. Completing a thesis promotes independent learning, problem-solving, and scientific research skills, which are essential for postgraduate study and career success (Garrison & Anderson, 2003).

However, both pose many challenges for students during this time. Therefore, in the final stage of the English university program, students often face two main tasks: completing an internship and writing a graduation thesis. This dual responsibility creates significant pressure on time, energy and mental health. It requires students to be well prepared in planning work and rest to balance and maintain long-term effectiveness. This research investigates the dual burden of practicums and thesis writing among English-major undergraduates in Vietnam, revealing how this simultaneous responsibility affects their academic performance, mental health, and career preparedness, and highlighting the urgent need for institutional support and curriculum reform.

There has been a previous study on final-year language students in the Mekong Delta titled *Unsatisfactory Internship Experiences of English Major Students: A Case Study in Vietnam* (Phuong *et al.*, 2023). The focus of the study is only on analyzing the causes leading to unsatisfactory experiences during the internship process at agencies and enterprises. The causes mentioned and analyzed are all in three groups:

- 1) causes from the interns themselves,
- 2) causes from the school, and
- 3) causes from the internship agency.

There is absolutely no discussion or mention of the pressure to simultaneously fulfill the dual roles of internship and writing a graduation thesis, as well as time management or stress arising from having to balance these two important tasks.

Therefore, there are very few in-depth research studies in Vietnam, especially in the Mekong Delta region, focusing on students' life experiences in taking on these two roles. Accordingly, this research is urgent for senior students and schools, aiming not only to bring real-life experiences of students majoring in this field but also to clarify the challenges they face. From there, it helps them have a more comprehensive and closer view so that schools can adjust gaps in the training program, such as increasing psychological counseling sessions or career orientation, and students can have better preparation for the future.

By using a qualitative narrative approach, this study allowed students to share their personal stories, providing deep and authentic insights that quantitative methods may not capture. This is not just a research study, but also a moving record that speaks to the pain of students during a challenging period. Empowering participants to tell their own stories not only gives them a voice but also allows us to gain a deeper, more empathetic understanding of their struggles and successes (Chase, 2005).

1.2. Research Aims

This study delved into the complex challenges and reflective processes that senior English students at Tay Do University encountered when undertaking dual responsibilities as interns and thesis writers.

At the same time, to analyze how these students adjusted, adapted, and balanced between academic and professional responsibilities during the final stage of their undergraduate program.

Last but not least, this study employs a qualitative narrative approach to highlight the students' personal reflections and identity development throughout their dual role journey.

1.3. Significance of this Study

This study is not only to bring practical value but also to contribute to the academic field. Practically, these findings inform lecturers, academic advisors, and universities about the specific challenges senior English students face when managing internships and writing their dissertations simultaneously. Based on these insights, they can recommend specific student support programs and timely interventions, including time management workshops, flexible scheduling strategies, and mentoring programs. One widely recognized key factor that contributes to students achieving their academic goals and professionals advancing in their careers is time management. (Patzak *et al.*, 2025). Developing time management skills helps students analyze tasks and schedule their completion, which in turn helps them develop more important planning skills and gain a better understanding of responsibilities as well as their importance when scheduling work. (Wilson, 2021). Additionally, for students, this study provides an opportunity to learn about their own coping strategies, stress tolerance, and personal growth. By sharing students' real-life stories of juggling dual roles, the thesis could inspire their peers or those facing similar challenges in the future.

Through the application of qualitative narrative research methods, the research will supplement the shortcomings in the existing documents on the dual roles of English students in Vietnam, especially in the Mekong Delta region. This also adds the voices of students in the Mekong Delta region in general and Tay Do University in particular about the journey to overcome the challenges of final-year students having to take on two roles at the same time. Chase (2005) emphasized, narrative inquiry empowers participants to share their lived experiences, offering emotional depth and authenticity that quantitative methods often overlook. Narrative inquiry is particularly valuable in Vietnamese

educational research as it enables participants to articulate their lived experiences, emotional struggles, and identity construction in context-sensitive ways (Le, 2025).

Moreover, the study will recreate a comprehensive picture of the emotional depth, motivation, and reflective journey of individual learners. The researcher will utilize the strengths of this method to overcome the numerical rigidity of the quantitative method, contributing to enriching the body of knowledge in higher education, educational psychology, and career orientation. Clandinin and Connelly (1990) laid the theoretical foundation for narrative inquiry in education, highlighting its power to reveal the complexities of learner development. Nguyen (2021) also demonstrated the effectiveness of narrative methods in capturing the reflective practices of EFL teachers in Vietnam, reinforcing its relevance in local educational research.

Theoretically, the dissertation will examine and extend the application of dual role theories such as Role Conflict and Self-Regulation, within the specific cultural and educational context of Vietnam. Through analyzing the real-world experiences of students simultaneously managing internships and writing dissertations, this research aims to clarify the psychological and behavioral mechanisms that learners use to cope with dual pressures, thereby contributing to the development of theories in the fields of education and applied psychology. Bui (2024) investigated self-regulation strategies among Vietnamese students in flipped classrooms and demonstrated how learners respond to academic pressures by employing internal coping mechanisms. Role conflict theory, as discussed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), describes how competing responsibilities such as internships and thesis writing can result in increased stress and reduced performance. This study not only reinforces existing theoretical frameworks but also highlights cultural influences, including family expectations and prevailing notions of success, which shape the ways students manage and reconcile their dual roles.

The study could become a valuable reference source for future researchers; the stories and coping strategies would be a database source providing detailed hypotheses for future studies to compare across disciplines or regions, opening up new research directions on issues related to the transition from the academic environment to the working environment of students.

1.4. The Organization of the Study

This paper is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 1:** Introduction provides the rationale, research aim, and the significance of the study, along with an overview of the thesis structure.
- **Chapter 2:** Literature Review examines the theoretical concepts of internships and graduation theses. It also explores the challenges students face and reviews existing research to identify the research gap.
- **Chapter 3:** Research Methodology describes the research design, participant selection, and the specific instruments, such as interview methods, used to collect data. It also details the procedures for data analysis.

- **Chapter 4:** Findings and Discussion presents the personal narratives of the participants, followed by a thematic analysis of the data. This chapter discusses the key findings related to the students' challenges and coping strategies.
- **Chapter 5:** Conclusion and Recommendations summarizes the main findings and draws conclusions. It also discusses the study's implications, acknowledges its limitations, and provides recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework: Dual Role Theory in Education

The complexities of managing dual roles in higher education, particularly the simultaneous demands of writing a thesis and undertaking an internship, are explored in this chapter. These responsibilities often create psychological and behavioral challenges, so a solid theoretical framework is needed to understand how students cope and adapt to balancing these dual tasks. Perspectives from role conflict theory (Kahn *et al.*, 1964), role strain theory (Goode, 1960), self-regulation theory (Zimmerman, 2000), along with frameworks of academic identity (Gee, 2000; Beijaard *et al.*, 2004) and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985) are synthesized in this chapter to develop a comprehensive perspective for analyzing dual roles. Together, these theories provide insights into the conflicts, tensions, adaptations, and identity negotiations that students experience, forming the conceptual foundation for discussions of role demands, coping strategies, and educational outcomes.

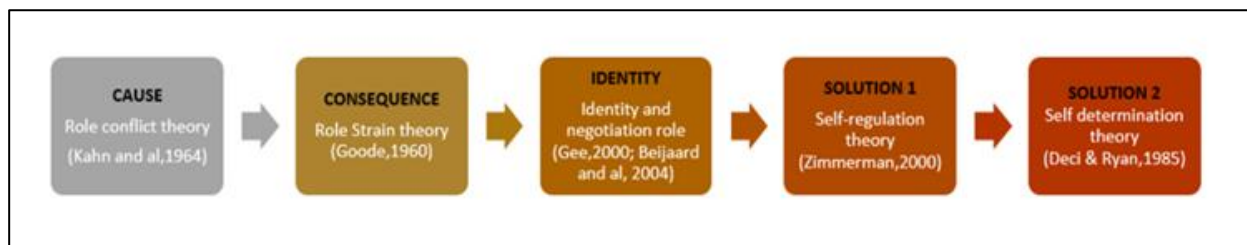


Figure 1: Theoretical framework for understanding dual role management in higher education

2.1.1. Role Conflict Theory

Role conflict is the simultaneous presence of incompatible demands from two (or more) different tasks, such that compliance with one task makes compliance with the other more difficult (Kahn *et al.*, 1964). In fact, to balance the roles of writing a thesis and an internship for final year language students, different factors must be met to perform well, as both are important tasks. Quiet space, critical thinking and deep analysis are necessary requirements for doing well on a thesis, while flexibility, adaptability and professional competence are all key factors to create a satisfying internship experience. Having to frequently switch roles under conditions of limited resources, such as time and mental energy, can lead to stress and reduced effectiveness in one or both areas.

According to the authors, the types of role conflict include: Intra-sender occurs when conflict arises from one individual with conflicting demands. Inter-sender conflict comes from different individuals having conflicting expectations. Inter-role involves pressure from one role conflicting with pressure from another role. Finally, Person-role happens when the requirements of the role contrast with the individual's personal ethics or values.

This study primarily focuses on inter-role conflict, particularly in relation to thesis writing and the internship responsibilities of senior English students. The conflict of external demands between roles (inter-role conflict) is a forerunner that leads directly to the internal psychological pressure experienced by the student, it is Role Strain.

2.1.2. Role Strain Theory

Goode (1960) introduced the concept of role strain, describing it as the stress that arises when role expectations exceed the resources available to the individual. While conflicting external demands (role conflict) represent conflict between different roles, role strain reflects the internal pressure of managing excessive or ambiguous demands. Goode argued that such stress is not the exception but the unavoidable result of balancing multiple responsibilities.

In the context of students managing both a dissertation and an internship, stress arises not only from external demands but also from internal feelings of inadequacy. Consequently, students may experience fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and reduced motivation due to this internal stress, which highlights an imbalance between expectations and available resources. By applying Role Strain Theory, educators can better understand these psychological behaviors as predictable outcomes of resource decline, enabling timely supports like workload adjustments and psychological support.

To proactively cope with and minimize the negative psychological impacts arising from role strain, students need to be equipped with and apply effective coping strategies. For this reason, students benefit significantly from adopting positive coping strategies to manage the stress that arises when undertaking academic and professional roles. One of the most effective methods is problem-focused coping, which helps individuals proactively deal with sources of stress by seeking information, advice from experienced people or developing new skills to solve problems (Folkman and Lazarus, 1985). In addition, emotion-focused coping strategies also play an important role in maintaining psychological stability. Techniques such as meditation, exercise, or simply sharing emotions with friends can help students relieve mental pressure, thereby recharging their energy to continue working (Misra & McKean, 2000). When flexibly combined, these two groups of strategies not only help students maintain psychological health but also enhance adaptability and work performance in a multitasking context. However, to successfully cope with the pressure, external support, and how students manage and negotiate their roles in this contradictory environment are necessary solutions. This is the core meaning of Academic Identity Theory and role negotiation.

2.1.3. Academic Identity Theory and Role Negotiation

Gee (2000) presents the concept of identity as flexible, shaped by how individuals are recognized in various contexts. This perspective is crucial to understanding how students actively negotiate their academic and professional identities as a core psychological mechanism for aligning the conflicts and strain between the roles they face. Beijaard *et al.* (2004) contribute to this understanding by describing identity formation as a dynamic negotiation process influenced by conflicting roles and expectations.

Senior students who take on dual roles of intern and researcher often face conflict as these two tasks require different and possibly overlapping tasks, making it difficult for them to maintain work efficiency, because they have to balance their academic and professional identities. This conflict becomes visible when scheduled meetings with thesis supervisors overlap with internship obligations, necessitating active negotiation of both roles. Success in this balancing act relies not only on completing tasks effectively but also on demonstrating commitment to both roles to gain recognition from academic and professional mentors.

In challenging contexts, many students cultivate an **Affinity-Identity** by participating in supportive communities, such as Thesis and Internship Student groups on social media. These platforms provide opportunities to share time management strategies, discuss pressures, and offer mutual encouragement. Such communal identities serve as vital sources of resilience, empowering students to navigate their dual roles.

In contrast, the **Nature-Identity** can impose unnecessary pressure, as students may be labeled with fixed traits like “naturally gifted” or “research-talented.” When they struggle to meet expectations, they may feel they are failing to keep these labels, leading to stress and self-doubt. This internal negotiation necessitates a re-evaluation of self-worth beyond external achievements, allowing students to redefine their values in light of their experiences. Importantly, successful negotiation and sustained engagement with these dual identities requires a proactive coping skill set, mainly fostered through strategic processes of Self-Regulation.

2.1.4. Self-Regulation Theory

Zimmerman (2000) defines self-regulation as a planned and flexible process of thinking, feeling, and acting to achieve personal goals. This is the basic behavioral mechanism that students use to successfully perform the role negotiation process discussed earlier, translating internal understanding into external action and task management. He outlines three stages of self-regulation: Forethought (goal setting and planning), Performance (implementing and monitoring behavior), and Self-Reflection (evaluating and adjusting strategies). This framework can assist students in managing the psychological demands of dual roles. For example, during the thesis-writing phase, students can break down their research into manageable parts, prioritize their tasks, and develop self-efficacy to maintain motivation. Similarly, in internships, establishing career goals and tracking progress can enhance effectiveness. By flexibly and purposely shifting between these two roles, students can develop self-regulating skills that mitigate the

psychological strain of balancing multiple responsibilities. In the context of demanding a balance between thesis work and practicum, the most evident manifestations of self-Regulation are identified through key practical skills including: Time management, organizational, detailed planning and prioritization skills.

Time management and organizational skills emerge as the first two basic requirements, as they represent the ability to set goals and allocate resources strategically. *First of all, time management and organizational skills are two basic foundational skills that any student must have, because it helps them to organize their time and come up with ideas to divide their work clearly to ensure effective implementation of both tasks. As they can spend time writing a good quality thesis without affecting the internship deadline. Students with strong time management skills demonstrate higher academic performance and reduced stress levels* (Britton and Tesser, 1991)

Second, equally important skills are detailed planning and prioritization, which involves breaking down dissertation tasks into smaller milestones rather than one large task that feels overwhelming and aligning them with the internship schedule. Macan *et al.* (1990) argue that structured planning improves productivity and reduces procrastination. Another strategy is to set realistic and achievable goals, as Locke and Latham (2002) suggest. By setting achievable goals, students can maintain motivation and avoid the frustration that arises from overly ambitious expectations. This approach also fosters a sense of accomplishment, which reinforces persistence in both academic and professional roles.

In case of changes in the supervisor or internship requirements, adaptable learners will adjust their strategies more quickly, minimizing disruption to the thesis. At the same time, learning and working efficiency increases because they allow learners to choose working methods that are appropriate to the actual situation. According to Zimmerman (2000) and Pintrich (2004), self-regulated learners can set goals, monitor progress, and adjust strategies when facing difficulties. Although Self-Regulation Theory describes how students manage their tasks and behaviors, it does not fully capture the underlying motivations for maintenance. Therefore, to understand the willingness, energy, and persistence required for students to sustain these challenging self-regulation efforts, the next section will integrate the fundamental role of basic psychological needs, which are outlined in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

2.1.5. Self-Determination Theory

Deci and Ryan (1985) proposed Self-Determination Theory, which refers to intrinsic motivation and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness for optimal performance and well-being. This theory describes how the satisfaction of these needs influences students' motivation and success while juggling dual roles.

In strict internship environments, challenges to autonomy frequently arise, leading to feelings of control loss. When supervisors provide not enough feedback or fail to align tasks with students' abilities, their sense of competence may diminish, resulting

in procrastination and decreased motivation. Furthermore, a lack of connection between academic and professional settings can reduce essential social support, worsen feelings of isolation.

When these fundamental psychological needs are not satisfied, students may struggle to cope with the demands of their dual roles, leading to burnout and diminished performance. Understanding the complexities of managing dual roles in higher education requires an integration of various theoretical perspectives. Role Conflict and Strain theories highlight the external and internal pressures students face, while academic identity theory illustrates the dynamic negotiation of self in response to these pressures. Self-regulation and self-determination theories provide practical frameworks for enhancing students' coping strategies and motivation. Together, these theories offer valuable insights into the challenges and strategies that can enable successful navigation of dual roles, eventually supporting students' educational outcomes and well-being.

2.2. Definitions and Types of Role Conflict

2.2.1. Definitions of Role Conflict

Kahn *et al.* (1964) defined role conflict as occurring when a person takes on two (or more) roles and the demands from those roles are incompatible, making it difficult or impossible for the person to fulfill them all. In the extreme case, satisfying the demands of this role completely prevents satisfying those of the other; the two pressure groups are mutually contradictory. Similarly, Biddle (1986) confirmed that role conflict arises when individuals are faced with incompatible expectations regarding their social status.

In the context of higher education, role conflict is particularly prominent for final year students, who have to undertake both academic and internship roles at the same time. Both are extremely important tasks, but there is no similarity or mutual support, leading to role conflict. While the researcher needs quiet space, critical thinking, in-depth analysis and independent working skills to contribute to a quality thesis, the intern needs time working at the internship unit, demonstrating professional competence, flexibility and the ability to adapt to the working environment. If we have to constantly switch from a state of flexibility and adaptability to a state of perseverance and high concentration or vice versa, within a limited time and resources (time, health, spirit, concentration), it will lead to a state of overload and stress, reducing the effectiveness of one or both tasks.

Recent studies in Vietnam have highlighted the challenges faced by English majors during their internships. Hoang *et al.* (2023) found that many English majors rated their internships as “unsatisfactory”, not only because of limited institutional support but also because the demands of teaching practice left them with little time or energy for academic work.

2.2.2. Types of Role Conflict

Scholars have identified several distinctive types of role conflict, particularly relevant to the dissertation-internship context. First, time conflict occurs when the time required for one role interferes with the completion of another (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). For

example, students may spend a lot of time preparing for group projects, deadlines, or attending internship site meetings, leaving them with insufficient time for dissertation-related tasks such as data analysis or referencing relevant literature. This time conflict often leads to reduced quality research work and increased stress. Research in role theory highlights that incompatible demands from academic and professional environments often force individuals into prioritization dilemmas, undermining performance in one or both areas (Beehr & Glazer, 2005; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970).

Second, expectation-based conflicts arise when the expectations of different role assigners are incompatible (Katz & Kahn, 1978). An internship instructor may expect a student to prioritize performance at work, while a thesis supervisor simultaneously demands consistent progress in writing and research. Students, caught between these opposing expectations, may feel incapable in both roles, leading to frustration and decreased performance.

Third, resource-based or energy-based conflict refers to the reduction of personal resources such as energy, concentration, and emotional resilience (Marks, 1977). After a stressful day of internships, students often feel mentally exhausted, reducing their ability to engage in cognitively demanding tasks such as synthesizing documents or drafting thesis chapters. This type of conflict reveals the finite nature of human resources and the difficulty of maintaining high performance in many skill-intensive roles. It has been observed that prolonged multitasking across academic and internship demands exhausts psychological energy, leaving students less capable of sustaining the deep, analytical work required for research (Cinamon & Rich, 2002; Peeters *et al.*, 2005).

2.3. The Effects of Role Conflict on Academic and Professional Performance

The impact of role conflict is not limited to immediate stress but can also significantly affect both academic and professional outcomes. In the short term, role conflict has been shown to negatively affect students' mental health, leading to increased anxiety, burnout, and decreased motivation (Salmela-Aro *et al.*, 2009). Onwuegbuzie (1997) further demonstrated that academic role stress can weaken students' ability to concentrate, thereby reducing the quality of academic output. For final year English major students at Tay Do University, task conflict between internship and thesis writing often manifests in poor completion of professional responsibilities, not deep thesis drafts reflecting their struggle to balance dual roles, accompanied by decreased motivation, health, and increased pressure.

In addition to these immediate consequences, role conflict also has a long-term impact on career orientation. Lent *et al.* (1994), through Social Cognitive Career Theory, contended that repeated experiences of conflict and failure can alter individuals' self-efficacy beliefs and career aspirations. Eccles (2005) also displayed that students' perceptions of task values and competencies shape their achievement-related choices. In the context of higher education in Vietnam, in the Mekong Delta region, students who experience persistent conflicts between practicum and thesis requirements may begin to question their suitability for the profession they are practicing or pursuing academic

research, potentially redirecting their career paths to less demanding or more flexible occupations. This highlights the importance of resolving role conflict not only as a short-term academic issue but also as a factor with long-term implications for professional identity and career development.

2.4. Ways to Improve Students' Coping Strategies

Overcoming the impact of role conflict and strain (as outlined in Theory 1 & 2) is an urgent task for senior English students at the time of undertaking their practicum-thesis. To do so, students need to improve their personal skills and take advantage of support from social relationships. There are three key aspects to help improve strategies to cope with their impact, each of which directly strengthens students' psychology to navigate demanding roles including: soft skills training, mentoring, and adjusting the internship-thesis schedule.

First, soft skills are often considered to be the foundation for self-management in high-pressure academic and professional environments. Robles (2012) identified skills such as problem-solving and organization as key indicators of career success. Importantly, these skills are a practical manifestation of students' Self-Regulation (as outlined in Theory 4). When targeted training in time management and stress management is provided, students are equipped with practical tools to allocate resources effectively, directly address Role Conflict, and reduce the intensity of Role Stress. In addition, Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2005) provided real evidence that specific personality sides, especially carefulness, are strongly linked to intellectual ability and academic success. A student with self-management skills will find it easier to monitor their progress in both internship and thesis, thereby developing better autonomy and competence. These are also the core intrinsic motivations emphasized in Self-Determination Theory (Theory 5), which confirm that autonomy and feelings of competence are strong drivers of engagement and long-term success.

Second, mentoring and counseling represent social support that plays an essential role in students' emotional and cognitive navigation. Jacobi (1991) has shown a strong connection between quality mentoring and increased academic persistence and personal development. In the context of dual roles, the mentor acts as an important negotiating agent, assisting students in defining and balancing their emerging professional identity with their existing academic identity, a process that is central to the Academic Identity and Negotiation role theory (stated in Theory 3). By providing validation and a reflective space, this is crucial for managing the internal pressures of Role Stress. Furthermore, Nora and Crisp (2007) emphasize that social support systems reinforce students' sense of Relatedness and Competence – two of the three basic needs in Self-Determination Theory (Theory 5). This external supervisor support strengthens students' internal resources, making them more resilient to the challenges of Role Conflict.

Finally, Strategies for scheduling and adjustment focus on adjusting the external environment rather than relying solely on students' internal resources. A classic approach is "phased supervision" recommended by Wisker (2005) during the

dissertation writing process. This approach allows students to apply self-regulation principles by breaking down an overwhelming workload into specific, manageable tasks, thereby reducing stress and maintaining steady progress. Furthermore, scheduling flexibility has a direct impact on students' sense of control and autonomy. Astin (1993) confirms that the learning environment and flexibility in scheduling are extremely important for students to learn best. In the context of dual roles, universities proactively adjusting important deadlines (e.g. dissertation deadlines) away from the peak internship period will help to minimize role conflict. Committing to such a flexible schedule not only gives students greater autonomy, a core psychological need in Self-Determination Theory (see Theory 5), but also allows them to manage their time and prioritize tasks based on personal judgment. This reduces time pressure, and students can more effectively navigate complex roles. These changes not only support academic progress but also strengthen self-determination, making students more resilient to role stress.

2.5. Previous Studies on Students Balancing Practicum and Thesis Writing

Previously, there have been some studies researched about practicum and thesis writing. However, the topics are not exactly the same, and the participants are also from different years. The following related studies may suggest strategies for balancing the dual roles for senior students or the difficulties that hinder English students from achieving good results in their internships.

In the international context, Farrell (2008) conducted a study entitled "Reflective Practice for Language Teachers". The participants were pre-service and in-service teachers in international contexts. His research pointed out that internship experiences often create tensions between theoretical knowledge and practical needs, and that reflective practice can act as a coping mechanism to reconcile these dual pressures. He used a conceptual and reflective approach, drawing on case studies of reflective practice. Farrell identified role conflicts between academic and professional demands, emphasizing reflective practice and identity negotiation as coping strategies.

Similarly, Johnson and Golombek (2002) carried out a study on "Teachers' Narrative Inquiry as Professional Development". They focused on pre-service and in-service teachers in the United States. Through a narrative research approach, they explored how these teachers negotiated their professional identities and tensions between theory and practice. Their findings revealed that identity negotiation and reflective practice are central to professional growth.

In the Vietnamese context, Hoang *et al.* (2023) implemented a study entitled "English Major Undergraduates' Unsatisfactory Practicum Experience: A Case Study in Vietnam". The participants were 222 English students, and demonstrated that many students reported unsatisfactory internship experiences. Their research pointed out that structural and personal barriers (short internship duration, low self-esteem, workload, lack of skills) lead to students' dissatisfaction with internships, showing systemic problems in Vietnamese higher education. Although this research indirectly examines thesis writing, it provides strong evidence that internships alone create significant role

pressures for English students, and these challenges are further compounded when combined with thesis demands. They adopted a mixed methods design, combining survey data with qualitative thematic analysis.

Taken together, international studies (Farrell, 2008; Johnson & Golombek, 2002) have extensively examined the tension between internships and academic responsibilities, and domestic studies (Hoang *et al.*, 2023) have noted the challenges associated with internships. Nevertheless, there remains a large gap in Vietnam regarding the dual role of practicum and thesis writing for Senior English students. Existing Vietnamese studies mainly focus on the internship experience or the difficulty of writing a thesis, which is a single role during the final stage of undergraduate education, while the higher education environment increasingly requires students to fulfill multiple tasks, the dual role has received limited scholarly attention in Vietnam. Consequently, there is a lack of longitudinal or intervention-based studies evaluating coping strategies (e.g., reflective practice, mentoring, schedule adjustment) in the Vietnamese context. This gap creates a research topic that integrates both internship and dissertation responsibilities, based on a framework of five grounded theories and a qualitative narrative approach. While quantitative studies might measure stress levels, they fail to capture the lived experiences and emotional journeys of students. So, a qualitative narrative approach is required to understand the process of how students navigate these conflicting demands. This study not only enriches the literature but also brings practical implications for curriculum design and student support in Vietnam.

2.6. Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review established the core concepts of role conflict and role strain as the primary psychological and behavioral challenges faced by students in dual roles. To explain the processes of coping, Chapter 2 delves into the explanatory power of the Academic Identity and Negotiation Role theories, which focus on the construction of self and how students reconcile different identities. Self-Regulation Theory clarifies the ability to control thoughts, emotions, and actions in learning and professional practice. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explains the essential role of autonomy and internal motivation in maintaining persistence. Moreover, the summary and evaluation of previous practical studies highlighted effective coping strategies such as soft skills training and schedule adjustment. Last but not least, Chapter 2 clearly identified a significant research gap in the overall application of these five theories to the specific context of English language students in Vietnam.

In summary, this study is built on an integrated theoretical foundation from five different perspectives: role conflict, role strain, academic identity and role negotiation, self-regulation, and self-motivation. These theories serve as a design to guide the subsequent chapters of the study. The study recognizes that the difficulties that students encounter (such as role conflict or academic pressure) can be explained and mitigated by internal strengths (such as self-control and motivation), along with the process of adapting and building their own academic identity. It is this theoretical framework that

will help shape the research question, choose appropriate methods, analyze the data, and provide practical recommendations for schools and students.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

The research's purpose was to address the following questions:

- 1) How do senior English-majored students at Tay Do University experience the process of balancing practicum and thesis writing?
- 2) What are the main difficulties they encounter, and how do they respond while managing both roles simultaneously?
- 3) In what ways do these dual-role experiences influence their personal reflection and identity development as future English professionals?

3.2. Research Design

The design of this study is based on the research question stated in Chapter 3, research methodology. English- major seniors at Tay Do University were identified as the research participants. Specifically, 6 students participated in in-depth interviews and reflective journals that contributed to a comprehensive understanding of their dual role balancing process when writing their thesis and practicum. At the same time, this paper employed a qualitative research design, using the narrative research method as the main method. The narrative research method was chosen because it allows participants to share in-depth information about the dual role balancing process, such as personal stories, honest emotions, thoughts and meaningful lessons behind those experiences. This approach aims to enhance the accuracy and objectivity of the research results instead of focusing on numbers that only measure the level. Therefore, this thesis used a qualitative research method.

3.3. Participants

This thesis involved 6 English- majored seniors at Tay Do University who are currently completing their practicums and dissertations, although only 6 were interviewed in this article, as the author prioritized the quality of their experiences rather than the quantity of them. All participants were native Vietnamese speakers, and English was considered their foreign language. These participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the dual roles of intern and researcher, which is consistent with the focus of the study on exploring lived experiences. They were willing to share their personal stories and reflections in detail. Through the purposive sampling method, the researcher was able to select individuals who were most likely to provide rich and meaningful stories related to the research questions. Before collecting data, we obtained informed consent from participants, ensured secrecy and used pseudonyms to protect their identities.

3.4. Research Instruments

In this study, two main tools were used: semi-structured interviews and reflective diaries to collect detailed data and effectively capture the experiences of final-year English major students in balancing practice and thesis writing.

3.4.1. Interview Protocol

The main instrument was semi-structured in-depth interviews, designed to encourage participants to tell their experiences in an authentic and profound way. The interviews revolved around three research questions: 1. Participants' experiences in undertaking both internship and thesis writing, 2. Difficulties and challenges they encountered, 3. Strategies and coping mechanisms are used to maintain balance.

To allow participants to freely and fully tell their stories of moments in that period, the author provided Open-ended questions that asked them to develop specific events, feelings and reflections, while a follow-up hint was used to clarify or expand on key points. The interviews were conducted individually, audio/video recorded with the consent of the participants and then transcribed exactly for analysis.

3.4.2. Reflective Journals

Additionally, participants were encouraged to provide reflective diaries documenting their internship and thesis experiences. The diaries served as supplementary data and contrast with the stories from the interviews. Importantly, if participants actively recorded key events, emotions, decisions, and strategies in the context of undertaking these tasks, it was important to provide a rich context for the narrative analysis.

Together, these tools allowed for the collection of authentic, detailed stories of how students balanced dual roles, capturing both individual experiences and common patterns among participants. Methods were taken to ensure permission, privacy, and hiding throughout the data collection process.

3.5. Data Analysis

The study applied thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. First, the interview transcripts were transcribed and read several times to familiarize with the data. The participants' reflective journals were also reviewed and organized, and used as an additional source of data to compare and enrich the results obtained from the interviews. Then, initial codes were constructed from meaningful statements and moments in both the interviews and journals. These codes were grouped to form preliminary themes that reflected the participants' experiences of taking on dual roles. The themes were further reviewed, refined, and named to ensure clarity and coherence between the two data sources. Lastly, the themes were interpreted to build a narrative picture of how the participants coped and adapted during the internship and dissertation writing phase.

3.6. Research Procedures

The process of putting the research into action is described in this section. As a matter of fact, the study endured approximately 14 weeks and was split into three steps, as seen in the table below:

Table 1: Procedure of the research

Weeks	Activities
Week 1 - Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Select a research topic and create an outline.- Seeking materials to support the research.- Identifying the research questions, research aim, and research methodology.- Writing chapter 1.
Week 6 - Week 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Writing chapter 2.- Writing chapter 3.- Design interview questions and diary writing instructions.- Send interview questions and permission letter to participants.- Conduct data collection
Week 10 - Week 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Check and select appropriate data after collection.- Proceed to encode data and create themes, forming the desired data for discussion.- Writing chapters 4 and 5.- Completing the study.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Overview of the Analysis Process

This analysis highlighted the experiences of English- major seniors at TDU in simultaneously undertaking a practicum and writing a thesis. The author used triangulation, combining interviews and diaries, to enhance reliability. The data collected from the interviews focused on three main themes: Balanced Experiences, Difficulties and Coping Strategies. Moreover, diaries revealed emotions that were difficult to express clearly in interviews. This combination not only showed the behavior but also helped to understand the inner experiences of the students.

4.1.1. Familiarization

In this step, the author read and reread the raw data (interviews, diaries) of English-major seniors who were doing their internships and writing their dissertations at the same time. In addition to familiarizing myself with the data, deep reading was a way for me to take notes of first impressions, interesting points and start to form a comprehensive understanding of what the students were going through.

4.1.2. Coding

The researcher coded the entire dataset, identified interesting passages of text and assigned them short codes that described the basic meaning of the passage. From this process, various code groups were formed. For example, the code related to time

management strategies shared by participants indicated they needed to plan specific time allocations for each role to avoid excessive fatigue and difficulties in handling the remaining roles. *"Every day I will divide... 3 hours to do my thesis...I will spend resting... so I can wake up early. I will continue writing my thesis, then I will go to internship, that day I will not be tired"*. In addition, role conflicts are also noticeable, as evidenced by students having to prepare lesson plans (assigned from their internship unit) while still completing their thesis drafts, leading to feelings of confusion and reduced concentration. *"Like during an internship...when I have to prepare a lot of ...lesson plans, while...I also have to pay attention to my thesis. Sometimes I get confused...maybe I keep going back and forward and still haven't finished that...This distracts the focus from both roles."*

The code demonstrating typical schedules and overlapping deadlines also formed based on participant descriptions: *"My activities in a day7AM in the morning... work until 5:30PM ...I will take advantage of the time to write my thesis, from Monday to Friday,"* while other participants revealed overlapping deadlines: *"That day ...when I was given a deadline. I had to prepare lesson plans ..and I also had to write a draft for chapter 1... Both were equally, so that day I stayed up ...2-3 am. I was a bit tired."* These statements simultaneously create established emotional and mental code, the participant said: *"I feel tense and a bit stressed ...the large amount of work. I have to balance between doing a good practicum...and writing my dissertation. At first... I felt very comfortable. But after I became familiar with the job, my workload increased ...The further I progressed with the thesis...so I felt very stressed and pressured."* Another important code is the biggest challenge, which represents the participant's overall assessment of the biggest difficulty they faced: *"I feel like time management and keeping myself energized enough to complete both of those things is my biggest challenge right now."*

Code related to health, motivation, and concentration reflect the impact of two burdens on students' physical and mental well-being, such as: *"In terms of health...During the weeks of internship, it rained a lot but I had to run events continuously... Going home in the rain ...get sick. So it makes my spirit decline, I can't write a thesis that is emotionally secure"*. At the same time, they also provide information on strategies for maintaining motivation during this period, such as: *"I will rearrange my schedule a bit.. look at my internship schedule...then I rearrange my time... have some time to rest first... not try to do everything at once."*

Furthermore, the code regarding social support highlighted the importance of friends, family, and lecturer as some of the most crucial factors in providing emotional support, and they also provided specific assistance, as evidenced by the statements: *"I have a lot of support...I feel too stressed.. I will have friends to share my feelings...my family is also very supportive... Lecturers also.. support me... And seniors from previous years...their advice is very valuable to me."* Finally, the personal lesson code reflects the students' self-awareness in carrying out the two burdens, and it also reveals a deeper understanding of themselves: *"The biggest thing I learned...is to be patient with myself. Everything don't always go according to plan, and struggling or getting tired isn't a sign of failure — it just means I'm trying my best."*

4.1.3. Theme Development

Once I had a long list of initial codes, I proceeded to group them into potential patterns, forming broader themes. Using a mind map to visualize the relationships between codes and themes, I discovered three patterns:

Pattern 1 Pressure & Difficulty: "Typical Schedule", "Role Conflict", "Motivation, Health, Focus Loss", "Biggest Challenge", "Emotions and Mentality", "Overlapping Deadline.". Patterns 2 Coping Strategies: "Time Management", "Maintaining Motivation", and "Social Support." Pattern 3 Self-Awareness: "Personal Lessons."

From initial codes, three main themes emerged: (1) Experiences in balancing two roles, (2) Difficulties encountered, (3) Coping and adaptation.

4.1.4. Review and Refinement

In this step the researcher review all the codes within each topic to consider if they form a coherent pattern. Codes related to emotions were placed in Theme 1 to provide a more complete picture of role balance. Meanwhile, codes such as role conflict, loss of motivation, health and focus, and greatest challenge were grouped into Theme 2 to highlight specific difficulties. Finally, coping actions and personal lessons were combined into Theme 3, reflecting both strategies and self-awareness.

4.1.5. Final Naming and Definition

Three main themes were formed through a systematic analytical process. First, all the initial codes generated during the coding process were reviewed and compared; those with similarities in content or context were grouped to form preliminary code groups. These code groups were then further reviewed, merged, or adjusted to ensure that each group reflected a consistent aspect of the student experience. Next, the relationships between the code groups were analyzed to determine how they contributed to the broader themes. Through multiple comparisons and re-readings of the coded citations, the three main themes gradually took shape. Each theme was named based on the central meaning it represented and reinforced by the citations. The three main themes and their definitions are presented as follows:

- **Theme 1:** The experience of balancing dual roles is not only a race against time, but also a journey of positioning oneself between two worlds (research and practicum) with different rules and expectations.
- **Theme 2:** The difficulties in the journey of performing dual roles are the unavoidable consequence of personal resources (time, energy, focus) being challenged beyond their limits, leading to stress and imbalance.
- **Theme 3:** Coping strategies are specific actions taken by students to minimize challenges and enhance effectiveness when balancing the two roles. In addition, the personal lessons learned after this challenging journey are the most valuable thing; it is not only a lesson but also a journey to shape professional identity.

4.1.6. Producing the Report

This section presents the core findings of the study through the voices of participants, the underlying theory, and the researcher's own reflective thoughts. It demonstrates that the study not only describes but also delves into the profound complexities of balancing dual roles, analyzed through the lenses of Role Conflict, Role Strain, Academic Identity, Self-Determination, and Self-Regulation.

4.2. Presentation of Themes

Based on thematic analysis of participants' narratives, three main themes emerged:

- 1) Experiences in Balancing Two Roles,
- 2) Difficulties Encountered, and
- 3) Coping and Adaptation.

Each theme included several subthemes, which together explained how students experienced and handled the simultaneous demands of practicum and dissertation writing.

Table 2: Presentation of Themes

Main Theme	Sub-Themes
4.2.1 Theme 1: Experiences in Balancing Two Roles	4.2.1.1 Schedules and Time Allocation 4.2.1.2 Sub-theme: Emotional Strain 4.2.1.3 Sub-theme: Role Conflict
4.2.2 Theme 2: Difficulties Encountered	4.2.2.1 Core Challenge 4.2.2.2 Specific Conflict 4.2.2.3 Complex consequences
4.2.3 Theme 3: Coping and Adaptation	4.2.3.1 Personal Management Strategies 4.2.3.2 Maintaining Motivation 4.2.3.3 Social support

4.2.1. Experiences in Balancing Two Roles

This theme clearly depicts the experiences that final year English students often encounter when doing an internship and completing their thesis. It reflects the emotions, schedules, and dual role conflicts during this period. This provides useful information, aspects that need to be explored to directly answer Research Question 1, at the same time recreates the picture of their daily life during this challenging period and creates a premise to continue to develop themes 2,3.

4.2.1.1. Sub-theme: Schedules and Time Allocation

Analysis of data from six participants showed that the experiences of balancing internships and thesis writing could be divided into two main groups: those with fixed schedules and those with flexible schedules.

"During the time I had to balance between internship and thesis writing, every day was very busy and required high concentration. Every day I went to practice from about 7am

to 5:30pm at the internship unit, then in the evening I would take advantage of the time to write the thesis, from Monday to Friday. The work there required high concentration, so at the end of the day, I was often quite tired. However, when I got home, I continued to work on the thesis. Most evenings, I spent time reading documents, reviewing chapters and monitoring weekly progress. Sometimes, I felt that a day passed too quickly compared to the amount of work that had to be completed.” (Sophia’s diary)

“My internship schedule is about 4 days a week. It can be flexible in the morning, afternoon or evening. If there is an event, I will run the event all day. Then, in my free time, I will write my thesis. I don’t have a fixed schedule, so it’s very comfortable. It’s much easier to manage.” (Rose)

All participants revealed that they apply a fixed time division model. During the day (morning/afternoon), they spend time on practicum. This is a Compulsory priority due to the schedule arranged by the practicum unit (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6). At night or on free days, they spend on writing dissertation, finding documents (Jack: “8am to 12pm”; John, Fiona: write after the internship; Sophia: “I will take advantage of the evening”). However, they have a difference in the flexibility of the internship schedule.

For fixed, dense, and less flexible schedule group (Jack, Sophia, Fiona) practicum time takes up most of the day (Jack: 7am - 5pm; Sophia: 7am - 5:30pm from Monday to Friday). This schedule creates rigidity, limiting time for the thesis, whereas a flexible schedule group, distributed according to events (John, Alex, Rose), internship time varies (John: “some shifts are 2 hours, some are 5 hours”; Rose: “2.5 to 6 hours depending on the event”). This feature allows them to proactively arrange “gaps” to write their dissertation. Rose shared a clear strategy: “The practicum schedule is concentrated on the weekend, so at the beginning of the week I will have free time... to write my dissertation”.

As a result, this Subtheme contributes to explaining how researcher *responds to* Research Question 1 by showing how structural issues affect students’ learning experiences.

4.2.1.2. Sub-theme: Emotional Strain

To form the deep and authentic experiences of senior students, it is essential to have an important factor, which is their fluctuating emotions during the period of taking on both roles. This contributes to theme 1 to complete the answer to Research Question 1 through the revelations about how the emotional aspects of students take place during the process of taking on dual roles.

“At first, I was confused because I was doing both, and this was also my first time doing both, so being confused was inevitable.” (John)

"Emotionally, I felt confused and surprised by the tight schedule. Mentally, I felt a bit worried because I was afraid that my thesis would not be good and my work would easily not achieve good results." (Alex)

Most of them experienced the initial confusion and anxiety when they first came into contact with the two roles. On the contrary, their emotions changed over time. Some of them (Jack, Sophia, Fiona) had the main emotions of fatigue, pressure, and tension. Sophia clearly described the increase: *"after getting used to the job... I felt very stressed and pressured"*. Jack admitted that *"sometimes I was a bit frustrated"*. While participants (John, Alex, Rose) after the initial stage, they switched to feelings of excitement and enthusiasm. John: *"then I felt very excited"*, even felt *"dopamine increase"*. Rose affirmed: *"It felt quite chill, but not too much pressure"*.

4.2.1.3. Sub-theme: Role Conflict

The cause of these emotional fluctuations and difficulties in arranging time is role conflict, a concept that was mentioned earlier (Chapter 2). This problem occurs in many parts of the research paper and throughout the internship-thesis period. Although it is the root of the problem, not everyone realizes it, it is inherently systemic.

"I feel there is a conflict. I think it is best to separate the internship from the thesis writing period. Because not everyone can arrange an internship schedule. Sometimes the schedule will be fixed or it will be sudden, like in my case, many times the internship will be sudden and the schedule cannot be arranged proactively. So, if you have to write a thesis and do an internship at the same time, it will be very difficult for students." (Fiona)

"In my opinion, these two roles do not have any conflict. They are very harmonious because as an intern, I will have to try 100% to have a good internship, while the role of a student should not stop developing ourselves; we must always develop ourselves more. So writing a thesis helps to explore the potential within us. I feel that these two roles are really very matching with each other." (John)

John and Fiona were typical of the two groups of participants in terms of perceived competition between the two roles. They both perceived Time and Energy as the two main competing resources between the two roles. However, their views on the nature of the "conflict" were different.

The group that feels a clear conflict believes that the two roles are inherently contradictory and should be kept separate. Fiona is frank: *"I feel like it's quite a conflict... it's best to have the internship and the thesis writing separate."* Sophia agrees: *"most of the time I feel like it's a conflict."* This group openly acknowledges "role conflict" as an objective, systematic problem (*"the two should be separate"*). Although the group that feels harmony or sees this as a challenge, they see the two roles as complementary and mutually motivating. John argues: *"These two roles are really very well matched."* Rose states: *"I feel in*

harmony between the two." Alex has the perspective: *"It helps me to be able to face, experience... pressure that I try to overcome."* This group denies conflict, describing it as *"harmony," "matching,"* or *"challenging myself."*

Overall, analysis of Theme 1 showed that experiences of balancing the two roles suggest that the denial of conflict in the group may not fully reflect objective reality because they still have problems identified in Theme 2, such as time management and burnout, but rather it is a strategy to protect their self-image, avoiding the truth. In academic interviews, students often present themselves as proactive and competent learners, so they avoid admitting *"system conflict"* for fear of being seen as blaming external circumstances or lacking the ability to adapt. Instead, they take responsibility like John and Alex to maintain the image of people with high standards, showing a sense of responsibility and the ability to self-reflect.

Admitting personal discipline also helps them *"save face"*, because self-criticism is more acceptable than admitting that they are helpless victims of a Incomplete system. When reality fails, they do not lower their expectations or question the rationality of the system, but instead blame themselves. This is a typical trait of perfectionism. Rose seems less self-blaming, but her expression, *"it's pretty chill, not too stressed"*, is also an attempt to present herself as a calm, emotionally controlled person, a quality that is highly valued by society. Their expressions are also typical evidence of their having a Natural Identity, an identity that is part of Identity theory, Gee's (2000), which was presented (chapter 2). Natural Identity can cause unnecessary pressure, as students may be labeled with fixed traits such as *"natural talent"* or *"research talent"*. When they have difficulty meeting expectations, they may feel they cannot maintain these labels, leading to stress and low self-esteem. These difficulties will be fully presented in Theme 2 Difficulties Encountered and are more evident in subjects who deny the conflict of dual roles.

4.2.2. Difficulties Encountered

This section describes the challenges students face when taking on dual roles. It reflects the core difficulties, specific conflicts and the effects on health, motivation... in the journey of forming and competing between the two egos.

4.2.2.1. Sub-theme: Core Challenge

In the process of conducting two responsibilities, barriers are unavoidable, forcing students to face and recognize the problem. In this part, the author will point out the core difficulties that most students encounter in order to make useful contributions to theme 2 to form the answer to research question 2.

"I find the biggest challenge is how to manage my time so that I can both do my internship and write my thesis properly." (Jack)

"I feel that managing my time and keeping myself energized enough to complete both tasks is my biggest challenge at the moment" (Sophia)

The above are some of the main challenges they shared. Most (5/6) participants identified Time Management as the biggest and core challenge. They described a vicious cycle: internship time is taken up, time for thesis is reduced, leading to deadline pressure and quality of work. Furthermore, all of them pointed out that a lack of time leads to exhaustion of energy and health. Fiona vividly described: *"After work, I still have to find documents, research... then I really don't have the energy to write... I don't have enough health to handle both."*

4.2.2.2. Sub-theme: Specific Conflict

In addition to the core difficulties mentioned internally, this sub-theme will present the specific external manifestation of the problem while performing two parallel roles. That is, schedule overlap.

"I prioritize completing my internship first, and then I will write my thesis later when I have more time." (Fiona)

"I often have overlapping schedules. So, I have to change one of the two schedules. Or I have to temporarily stop one to do the other. Usually, we will negotiate. But most of the time, we will ensure the internship schedule. We will negotiate with the supervisor to write the thesis later." (Rose)

Overscheduling is common, occurring in 5/6 participants. Alex was the only one who did not encounter it, thanks to the flexible internship schedule and the proactive arrangement of the supervisor. They prioritize completing the internship obligation as a general principle. An internship is considered a more urgent responsibility and more difficult to negotiate than the thesis deadline. However, there are some differences in this: Direct overscheduling occurs when the meeting schedule with the supervisor overlaps with the internship time. In such cases, they proceed to negotiate or postpone one side (usually the thesis side). In contrast, indirect overscheduling (Exhaustion), as in John's case, does not specific overlap time, but the accumulated pressure from this role leaves no energy for the other role. John described: *"When I work too much at the center, when I get home, I don't have the energy to do anything... so I don't have enough energy to do the thesis"*. John's approach is to "make up for lost time," trying to reallocate time flexibly and based on emotions, rather than a fixed plan.

Those who admitted to overlapping schedules indicated that role conflict was present and unavoidable. They had to sacrifice sleep, negotiate, or prioritize one role over the other. Their specific, real-life examples were an answer to research question 2.

4.2.2.3. Sub-theme: Complex Consequences

In addition to the difficulties students face in performing two tasks, they also cause negative impacts on students due to the complex consequences of the two opposing roles, such as loss of concentration, health and physical decline.

"When I am too busy, I will lose motivation, lose energy and have difficulty focusing on my work. I will feel mentally overloaded. For me, it is difficult to focus on taking on both roles because in each role, I have to be responsible to do well." (Sophia)

"I feel affected a lot. Because having to divide my time for two things at the same time makes me lose focus sometimes, because there are many times when I have to do one thing while also worrying about the other." (Fiona)

"In terms of health...During the weeks of internship, it rained a lot, but I had to run events continuously... Going home in the rain ...get sick. So, it makes my spirit decline, I can't write a thesis that is emotionally secure". (Rose)

Through the participants' sharing, they all have in common that the consequences of role conflict are that the ability to concentrate is seriously affected. They describe the state of distraction, not being able to concentrate on one thing. In addition, they are also affected in terms of physical health and motivation, especially fatigue, stress and the risk of burnout. However, there is an interesting difference between them. In the case of Rose and Fiona, they can maintain motivation at this time, which is interesting. Although they both face difficulties in terms of time and health, these two participants do not feel demotivated. Fiona explains with her interest in the thesis topic: *"writing a thesis is also a topic that I quite like, so I do not lose motivation."* Rose shares with a positive internship environment: *"When doing an internship in a happy atmosphere, it maintains motivation a lot. Then it will maintain the energy to... rewrite the thesis"*.

In summary, findings of this Theme point out that intrinsic motivation (interest in work) and positive environmental factors are one of the ways that can help students overcome objective difficulties in motivation and health. Their difficulties are not only "lack of time" but also multidimensional: mental (stress, loss of motivation), cognitive (loss of concentration), physical (fatigue, illness), and emotional (frustration, anxiety). This shows that role conflict not only affects work performance but can also harm overall health, which provides a satisfactory answer to research question 2.

4.2.3. Coping and Adaptation

Based on the challenges and emotional changes identified in Themes 1 and 2, student narratives indicate that coping with the double burden is not a passive process but rather an active building of a three-pillar adaptive system. Specifically, participants reported relying on:

- 1) personal management strategies,
- 2) maintaining motivation, and
- 3) social support networks.

Rather than operating in separation, these pillars complement each other, and the degree of emphasis on each pillar varies depending on each student's individual experience, perceptions, and context.

4.2.3.1. Sub-theme: Personal Management Strategies

Personal management strategies are vital for senior English students at Tay Do University when balancing the dual burden, because it helps them limit difficulties and, at the same time, create opportunities to actively fulfill the dual role.

Two main strategies formed in how students arranged and divided their time. The first is the arrangement and division strategy, common in groups with specific schedules. These learners divide time according to a fixed frame. Jack shared: *"Every day I will divide my time into about 3 hours to do my thesis, the rest of the time I spend on resting"*.

Alex and Sophia also systematically apply the *"day-internship / night-thesis"* model. They also engage in Planning and note-taking, Sophia *"plan to divide tasks in order of importance to do in a week"*. While Fiona *"I write down my schedule and take notes of the things I have to do... so I don't forget"*. Another tactic is prioritizing by nature of work, as Jack arranges to do the theoretical parts (chapters 1, 2) of the thesis in parallel, leaving the experimental/more difficult parts for the end of the internship.

The second tactic is flexible & emotionally based approach, typically applied by students with flexible schedules or emphasizing emotional factors. These students take advantage of flexible schedule "gaps", as Rose shared: *"The internship schedule will be concentrated on the weekend, so I will have free time at the beginning of the week... I will take advantage of it, I will finish writing everything"*. This is a passive-adaptative strategy, taking advantage of external structure. Meanwhile, John openly abandons rigid discipline: *"I don't have... any rules... whatever comes first, I will do it first... I am also a person who lives by my emotions a bit too much, so whatever I feel interested in, I will do"*.

There is a clear distinction between the group with a clear structured strategy (Jack, Alex, Sophia, Fiona, Rose) and the group lacking a strategy, following their emotions (John). Those with a clear strategy often find ways to allocate time according to fixed frames or prioritize work, while John shows difficulty in self-management, leading to discouragement. Time management strategies are not only techniques, but also reflect the level of personal discipline and self-regulation. Direct answer to research question 3.

4.2.3.2. Sub-theme: Maintaining Motivation

Besides personal management strategies, maintaining one's own intrinsic motivation is an important element in the coping and adaptation system, because it contributes to motivating students to overcome obstacles, create energy from within, and persevere with the original goal.

"I always remind myself that it's for my graduation goal... because I'm just one step away from graduating" (Sophia)

"I try to sleep early... eat regularly, I also spend an hour every day going to the gym to help my body recover and reduce stress" (Jack)

"I will have a period of time to rest first. I don't try to do everything at once." (Fiona)

For them, the sources of motivation that are exploited are divided into two types: future motivation and present motivation. Future Motivation this is the most powerful and common source of motivation, especially during the burnout phase. Graduation Goals: Directly mentioned by Alex, Fiona, and Sophia as a mental lever. Career & Personal Development Goals: John uses a deep self-questioning strategy: *"Remind yourself of the original goal. Why did I choose this path? ... to let my current self-continue to try"*. This is linked to the perfectionist and future-oriented self-image that he has built.

Motivation from the Present (Energise and Balance) Focus on managing the present state to maintain resilience including Physical Care: as Jack and Fiona shared above while Positive Environment: Rose finds motivation in the present moment of the internship role: *"when I go to the internship in a happy atmosphere it maintains motivation a lot. Then it will maintain the energy to... write the thesis"*. This is the mechanism of spreading positive emotions from one role to another.

Combining both sources of motivation (future and present) creates a more sustainable system. Future motivation helps to overcome crises, while present motivation helps to prevent burnout. This directly answers part of research question 3.

4.2.3.3. Sub-theme: Social Support

Social support networks are key to successful adaptation, playing three main roles: functional support, emotional support, and orientation support.

"I received support from my internship supervisor and thesis supervisor. If I had any difficulties, I would contact them directly for support anytime, anywhere. My family and friends also contributed to my internship and thesis writing process. I think my dream job is to become a teacher. The teachers at my internship gave me guidance on certificates such as a teaching certificate. Where to study, tuition fees, and how long the study period is" (Rose)

"My thesis supervisor enthusiastically helped me, she would take advantage of the time I could edit my papers or meet in person to discuss... about the internship, my fellow interns supported me... sharing work with each other, helping me not to be overwhelmed with too much work during the internship. It affected my career development... They helped me realize what I need to do in this job and how I will support others? My dream job is to be an English teacher. They shared with me the experience of what the working environment is like, how I have to cooperate, not only with students but also with colleagues, staff... They also shared with me teaching experiences, how I use words or style to help my students access the lecture more easily" (Alex)

"Because I have help from friends, family and lecturers, I feel that I am not alone in this process. I do not go alone but have many people observing, supporting and sharing with me, especially from my lecturers, because they are experienced people with a lot of valuable experiences. They have had experiences, so their advice is very helpful for me. In terms of

personal development, of course it is there, because we always need the help of lecturers to do our thesis and in terms of future careers... they have a lot of experience, they have gone through many challenges... so the experiences they have accumulated up to know to teach us, of course we can learn to apply in the future.” (Sophia)

All participants received support from social relationships such as lecturers, friends and family. Each of them played an important role in encouraging, caring, and even influencing future career development. Not just supporting the balance of these two burdens at the end of the training program. Instructors were the most important source of support and were mentioned by all participants. High-functioning support provided materials, corrections, topic suggestions, flexible revision schedules and career orientation support. Friends/Colleagues provided practical and emotional support, such as sharing internships, guidance on writing reports, sharing time management tips, and, importantly, listening and sharing feelings to relieve stress. Family played a major role in providing emotional and financial support, creating a solid “rear”.

Most importantly, they also influence personal and professional development. All participants confirmed that this support has a profound positive impact. It helps to complete work better, reduces feelings of loneliness and pressure, and provides lessons in cooperation and mutual support. In terms of Career Orientation and Development, the impact is outstanding. The support does not stop at the thesis but extends to providing information on teaching certificates, sharing experiences in teaching and handling pedagogical situations, inspiring and motivating to pursue the profession. John even considers this as a source of inspiration to later become a lecturer and “*pass on the experiences... to the next generations.*”

In conclusion, the final Theme reveals how all students cope and adapt, despite their differences. They find ways to manage their time, maintain motivation, and rely on social support. Students’ adaptation to the double burden is not a single action but an integrated process of resources. Including: Personalized strategies (time and work management, reflecting personality and schedule conditions), dual motivation (from the future and the present), Social support network (lecturers, friends, family), together they act as an essential “scaffolding”, not only helping students overcome difficult times but also promoting professional development and shaping future career paths. Success in adaptation is the result of a smooth interaction between personal efforts and effective social support systems. At the same time, the coping and adaptation theme has fully answered research question 3.

4.3. Discussion

The author used a step-by-step process to link the findings to the theories. First, the main themes based on the data analysis were compared with the theories presented in Chapter 2 through the following question:

- 1) How similar or different are these findings to what has been noted in previous studies?

- 2) Which theory best explains the situation described in the data?
- 3) What new contributions do the research results make to existing theories, especially in the Vietnamese context?

This process allowed the researcher to clarify how the main themes were connected to, supported by, or extended the theoretical frameworks.

Theme 1: Experiences in Balancing Two Roles

The findings in Theme 1 are consistent with Role Conflict Theory (Kahn *et al.*, 1964), which suggests that individuals experience stress when expectations from multiple roles become incompatible, particularly the descriptions of overlapping deadlines, lack of time, and emotional overload. This reflects the typical role conflict pattern between the researcher role and the trainee role. In addition, the “conflict denial” expressions of some participants in Theme 1 indicate that individuals sometimes experience role conflict but are not always fully aware of it or willing to acknowledge it, especially when they have to maintain a positive self-image. This is consistent with John and Alex’s self-responsibility despite the systemic difficulties they face.

The results also confirm Goode’s (1960) Role Strain Theory, which suggests that individuals are prone to self-blame when they fail to meet the demands of a role. The findings in theme 1 are also closely related to Academic Identity Theory, particularly the concept of “Natural Identity” presented by Gee (2000). The findings show that students tend to present themselves as calm, competent, and responsible, despite the fact that they are under pressure. This is an academic identity maintenance strategy that has been noted in previous studies, such as Ivanic (1998), where students try to maintain an “ideal learner image”. In contrast, Participants acknowledge systemic difficulties and proactively share them. This behavior represents a form of Affinity-Identity mentioned by Gee (2000), when they seek understanding and support from people in the same situation in the student community, thereby strengthening the spirit of cohesion and resilience. In particular, the author of this study also takes on a dual role as participants, sharing with the author also means that the author also becomes a spokesperson for the collective’s feelings to help personal experiences be recorded and spread.

Through the lens of the concept of “*role negotiation*” (Beijaard *et al.*, 2004), students’ non-questioning of the system’s demands and their self-adjustment reflect a form of internal negotiation. Instead of renegotiating role boundaries (e.g., asking for more time), they adapt by adjusting their own expectations. Finally, this study also confirms the Self-Regulation Theory. Self-blame for not meeting standards reflects a form of less effective self-regulation in which individuals continue to maintain high expectations while resources are depleted. This has been shown in Zimmerman’s (2002) research. Overall, analysis of Theme 1 complements existing literature by showing that Vietnamese students tend to “*show off their competence*” and avoid acknowledging role conflicts due to the cultural factor of “*saving face*”, which many Western studies do not emphasize.

Theme 2: Difficulties Encountered

The multidimensional difficulties that students described, such as psychological, cognitive, physical, and emotional, are consistent with Role Strain Theory when Goode (1960) asserted that role strain arises when the demands from the role exceed personal resources. Manifestations such as exhaustion, prolonged stress, and decreased concentration are role strain that have been confirmed by the author in the theory. The evidence presented in Theme 2 also demonstrates the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of Deci & Ryan (2000). SDT emphasizes that internal motivation can maintain behavior under difficult conditions if three psychological needs (autonomy - competence - relatedness) are met. Research shows that students have intrinsic motivation (interest in work content) and a supportive environment (friends, lecturers), helping them to continue to maintain efforts in harsh circumstances.

Notably, the finding of an impact on overall health expands the scope of the theory. While previous studies have typically discussed the impact on academic performance, this study shows that role conflict also affects mental and physical well-being, particularly in the Vietnamese context.

Theme 3: Coping and Adaptation

The strategies students used, such as time management, prioritization, maintaining motivation, and seeking support, clearly align with Self-Regulation Theory. According to Zimmerman (2002), effective self-regulated learners plan, monitor, and adjust their behavior. The findings showed that students engaged in this entire cycle, but not equally. This theme also fits with the spirit of Self-determination theory, particularly the need for relatedness. Relying on support from faculty, friends, and family is strong evidence that social relationships serve as “*anchors*” for students to overcome stress — a factor emphasized in the theory of Ryan & Deci (2017).

From the perspective of Role Negotiation, students demonstrate more proactive role negotiation than those in Theme 1. Instead of just enduring (in the initial stage), they restructure the order of tasks, change routines, or seek support to reduce role load, which is a form of strategic negotiation to optimize performance. Finally, the strategies they use are also consistent with the research on Role Strain, which suggests that individuals should develop “*role strain reduction strategies*” such as seeking help, reallocating time, and changing goals. The result of theme 3 complements the previous literature by showing that adaptation is not a single behavior but an integrated process between individual effort and social support systems, which most Western research has traditionally viewed as two separate elements.

In addition, the results indicate that the simultaneous experience of undertaking a practicum and writing a thesis significantly influences the self-reflection process and the formation of future professional identity for English majors. When faced with prolonged pressure, time constraints, and role conflicts, students gradually develop a more realistic understanding of professional requirements, moving beyond the idealized image of “*being a good English major is enough.*” The narratives suggest that self-reflection often

begins with moments of self-doubt, self-blame, and emotional overload; however, these very experiences become crucial turning points that enhance students' self-awareness and adaptability. Instead of undermining professional identity, the dual-role experience promotes a shift from academic identity to a more flexible and sustainable professional identity. Accordingly, students begin to view professionalism not only based on language proficiency, but also on the ability to regulate emotions, manage workload, seek support, and negotiate expectations within an institutional context. This process of reflection contributes to the formation of a resilient English-speaking professional identity, linked to practical experience, adaptability, and more realistic self-expectations—essential qualities for long-term career development.

4.4. Summary of Findings

In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings by theme, containing three main themes discussing how senior English students at Tay Do University manage the dual responsibilities of internship and thesis writing. The primary content consists of experiences in balancing two roles, difficulties encountered, coping and adaptation.

4.4.1. Experiences in Balancing Two Roles

First, the internship schedule largely determines a student's life during the internship and thesis writing period. There are two groups of schedules: fixed and flexible. However, they both tend to divide their time between the two roles quite similarly: days for internship – nights for thesis writing. Alongside this, anxiety, confusion, and fatigue begin to appear as a manifestation of the competition between the two burdens. Finally, role conflict exists during this period; however, some admit it while others avoid it (to maintain a positive image).

4.4.2. Difficulties Encountered

Stress is an unavoidable consequence of the conflict between two burdens, as they face challenges that cause psychological, cognitive, physical, and emotional effects. These challenges often lead to feelings of being overwhelmed, decreased motivation, and even self-doubt. The results show that these challenges not only affect work performance but also the overall health of students.

4.4.3. Coping and Adaptation

During the dual-role phase, all participants discovered adaptive strategies to successfully balance their two parallel responsibilities. Facing challenges, students explored and applied various coping mechanisms, such as time management, seeking support from social networks, maintaining motivation, and taking care of their well-being to maintain balance. These strategies helped them continue to perform their dual roles more intelligently and scientifically. Furthermore, this dual-role experience fostered self-reflection, personal growth, and a clearer sense of professional identity. Students gradually developed greater resilience and autonomy in making academic decisions.

Overall, these themes illustrate a complex yet meaningful journey in which senior students try to deal with a heavy workload while simultaneously developing self-regulation, emotional awareness, and job readiness. These findings form the basis for recommendations in the following chapter, aimed at helping prospective students navigate similar challenges more effectively.

5. Recommendations

Future research could broaden the scope of investigation to enhance understanding of the dual-role experience of university students. A promising approach would be to include a larger and more diverse group of participants, comparable across different training programs or geographic regions. Inter-university studies would help determine whether the challenges and coping strategies observed in this study are specific to Tay Do University or reflect broader patterns in higher education. Furthermore, conducting studies in both longitudinal and lateral directions would provide deeper, more generalized insights into how students' perceptions, stress levels, and adaptive behaviors evolve over time. Following participants from the start of their internship to the completion of their practicum could reveal developmental trends that short-term studies cannot capture. Such expanded research directions will contribute to a more comprehensive and subtle understanding of the case of dual role performance.

6. Conclusions

Today, higher education increasingly demands that students be good at multiple roles simultaneously. Internships and dissertations have emerged as a prime example of this dual role for senior English students. Research shows that balancing these dual roles is both a challenge and an opportunity for growth. Internships provide students with practical experience, helping them access the professional environment, enhance their skills, and adapt. Meanwhile, dissertations require intense focus on research thinking, analytical skills, and academic writing. If these two roles are not managed well, they can easily lead to time conflicts and psychological pressure, causing students to become overwhelmed.

Recognizing this, the author conducted an investigation into the dual burdens faced by senior English students at Tay Do University using a qualitative narrative research method. The study revealed the experiences, challenges, and coping strategies. Simultaneously fulfilling two roles is not simply a matter of time allocation, but a continuous negotiation process between academic expectations, career demands, and each student's self-management abilities. The overlapping pressures from the university, internship placement, and the students themselves create a challenging environment, forcing students to constantly adjust, adapt, and restructure their work habits. This reflects the reality that success in the final year depends not only on specialized

knowledge but also on the ability to self-regulate, manage emotions, and maintain motivation.

However, the study also indicates that students are not passive in the face of these difficulties. They proactively develop coping strategies, seek support, and cultivate new skills to maintain balance. The process of confronting pressure fosters cognitive growth, self-reliance, and the formation of a clearer professional identity. This demonstrates that the internship and thesis writing phase, while challenging, serves as a crucial transitional step, better preparing students for the real-world work environment after graduation.

From a broader perspective, the research emphasizes that the development of university students is inseparable from their emotional well-being and mental health. Therefore, curriculum design, especially in the final year, needs to be built on an understanding of students' stress tolerance as well as the integration of appropriate support mechanisms to reduce stress and enhance learning effectiveness. The insights gained from this research can help universities, lecturer, and internship placements develop more effective support policies and activities.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part 1: The experience of balancing two roles

- 1) Can you describe a typical day or week when you were doing both your internship and your thesis at the same time?
- 2) During that time, how did you feel emotionally and mentally?
- 3) Did you ever feel a conflict or a sense of balance between your role as a student and your role as an intern ?

Part 2: Difficulties encountered

- 4) What were the biggest challenges you faced when you had to handle both responsibilities?
- 5) Did you ever have schedule conflicts between your internship work and meetings with your thesis supervisor? How did you deal with that situation?
- 6) Did taking on these two roles affect your motivation, ability to focus, or mental health?

Part 3: Coping and Adapting

- 7) What personal strategies or habits have helped you manage your time and responsibilities?
- 8) How have you maintained motivation during stressful periods?
- 9) Have you received support from friends, family, or lecturer? How has that support helped you and impacted your personal or professional development?

Thank you for your kind cooperation!

Appendix B

JOURNAL WRITING PROMPT

Please write a short journal entry (about **300–500 words**) about your personal experience of **doing an internship while working on your thesis at the same time**. You may write in **English or Vietnamese**. Your reflection should be **honest** and based on your **real feelings or experiences**. You may use the following guiding questions:

- 1) What happened during the period when you were doing both your internship and your thesis? (For example: a typical week, memorable events, workload, etc.)
- 2) How did you feel emotionally and mentally during that time?
- 3) What difficulties or conflicts did you face when trying to balance these two roles
- 4) What did you do to overcome those difficulties or maintain balance?
- 5) What lessons did you gain from this experience?

Thank you for your kind cooperation!