FACTORS AFFECTING VIETNAMESE EFL TEACHERS' TRANSITION DECISION INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AS A SECOND CAREER

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
		In a time of ongoing shifts and increasing dynamism in English as a foreign language education, this study explores factors behind Vietnamese professionals' transition into English language teaching as a second career. Employing a qualitative multiple-case study design, it investigates the experiences of three second-career English as a foreign language teachers from varied professional backgrounds. Data from in-depth semi-structured interviews reveal four key themes: misalignment between previous careers and personal identities, English proficiency as an enabling factor, constraints in past career opportunities, and familial or socio-cultural encouragement. These findings show that teachers' transitions to English language teaching stem from complex personal and contextual factors, adding thickness to existing literature on the phenomenon of career change. The study discussion offers insights for teacher recruitment and provides recommendations to support the entry and retention of English language teaching workforce in Vietnam and similar educational contexts globally. Future research could build on these findings by including a larger, more diverse sample and conducting comparative studies across different educational systems.
KEYWORDS		

CÁC YẾU TỐ ẢNH HƯỞNG ĐẾN QUYẾT ĐỊNH CHUYỂN ĐỔI NGHỀ NGHIỆP SANG GIẢNG DẠY TIẾNG ANH CỦA GIÁO VIÊN VIỆT NAM

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
		Trước sự chuyển mình không ngừng của ngành giảng dạy tiếng Anh, nghiên cứu này tìm hiểu các yếu tố chi phối quyết định chuyển nghề sang giảng dạy tiếng Anh Với phương pháp định tính, nghiên cứu khảo sát ba giáo viên tiếng Anh xuất thân từ ba nghề nghiệp trước khác nhau. Kết quả phỏng vấn cho thấy có bốn nguyên nhân nổi bật: sự lệch pha giữa nghề cũ và bản sắc cá nhân, năng lực tiếng Anh có sẵn, thiếu cơ hội việc làm cũ, và sự ủng hộ từ gia đình, cộng đồng. Kết quả chỉ ra rằng sự chuyển đổi nghề nghiệp là kết quả của sự giao thoa những yếu tố cá nhân và bối cảnh phức tạp, góp phần bổ sung góc nhìn mới về hiện tượng chuyển đổi nghề nghiệp. Nghiên cứu mang đến những gợi ý thiết thực trong việc tuyển chọn và giữ chân đội ngũ giảng dạy tiếng Anh tại Việt Nam cũng như trong các môi trường giáo dục tương đồng. Các nghiên cứu trong tương lai có thể mở rộng với quy mô mẫu lớn hơn hoặc triển khai theo hướng so sánh giữa các hệ thống giáo dục đa dạng.
TỪ KHÓA		

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1. Introduction

Since joining ASEAN in 1995, Vietnam has increasingly prioritized English for regional and global integration. Besides conventional in-service teachers, second-career English teachers (SCETs) represent a valuable addition to the teaching workforce. Thus, this study focuses on the decision-making phase of SCETs' transitioning into English Language Teaching (ELT). Drawing on a qualitative case study approach, the study interviewed three individuals from varied professional backgrounds to explore factors affecting their transition decision to ELT. Drawing from related literature, career transition refers to the multifaceted process through which individuals shift from one professional role to another, involving not only environmental changes but also profound personal and psychological adjustments. Earlier conceptualizations, such as those presented in early 20th-century vocational theories, viewed career change as a rational and linear process driven by external triggers [1]. These early models emphasized a fit between individual traits and occupational roles, positioning the individual as relatively passive in the face of career changes. However, more recent developments in career theory highlight the dynamic and complex nature of such transitions. Different from traditional models that presented career change as a reactive or externally imposed adjustment, a fresher perspective called "life design paradigm" focuses on career adaptability and the active role of individuals in shaping their trajectories [2]. Incorporating psychological and social perspectives, De Vos, Jacobs and Verbruggen [3] pointed out that career transitions are often accompanied by inner conflicts related to identity, belonging, and a sense of purpose. Building on this view, career transition has expanded from just a change in job to a deeper process involving learning, emotional adjustment, and the redefinition of one's professional self in a world of constant change.

Narrowing down the scope, the transition journey into ELT represents a professional redirection, often characterized by prior careers in non-educational fields and a blend of personal aspiration and situational necessity. Previous studies have identified that the transition into ELT is shaped by both push and pull factors, following the logic of migration theory [4]. Push factors, including burnout, job insecurity, or value misalignment in prior careers, often drive individuals to leave their previous professions, while pull factors, including job stability, social contribution, and intrinsic fulfillment, attract them to teaching [5]. Motivations for entering teaching span a spectrum, from those who feel "called" to teach to those making strategic, albeit reluctant, career shifts [6]. The reflexive model of agency further complements this understanding, framing career transition as a process of evaluative judgment, where individuals weigh past experiences against future aspirations [7]. Whether driven by purpose or circumstance, SCETs' initial motivations tend to shape their expectations and resilience within the profession. To support diverse entry points into ELT, research called for structured and inclusive induction programs and mentorship during early career stages [8]. In the Vietnamese context, non-traditional EFL teachers have been examined in several studies (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Synthesis of existing studies in the research setting*

Study objectives	Methodology	Findings	Gaps from SCETs
Teacher agency of Vietnamese teachers of Russian, French, Chinese transitioning to English due to top-down directives [9] - [11]	Qualitative case studies (documents, interviews)	Challenges in adapting linguistically and pedagogically navigate ELT reforms	Participants have language education and background, which makes them not career changers
Identity formation of Vietnamese EFL teachers from business-related majors [12], [13]	Qualitative case studies (observations, interviews)	Neoliberal and branding ELT with legitimized lesson plans and materials	Participants are EFL teachers graduated from non-education majors, predominantly from business-related sectors

Taken together, participants in several studies were not official SCETs, as they had backgrounds in language education and just shifted subject areas. While SCETs from business majors were included in other research, the factors behind their transition decisions remain underexplored. In response to the identified gaps, this study seeks to answer the main research question: *What factors drive SCETs' decision to transition into English Language Teaching?*

To contextualize the transition process of SCETs, the Career Change Framework [14] offers a useful lens with three sequential stages: initiation, mediation, and commitment to a new career. In this study, the framework is adapted to the ELT context, with particular emphasis on the initial phase of career transition. The main research question is grounded in the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence career transitions. Shogren [15] proposes a social-ecological model of self-determination for a fuller collection in which internal motivations interact with nested external influences, which helps to better explain the complexities of SCETs' career transitions.

2. Methods/Materials

2.1. Research design

This study employs a multiple case study design within a qualitative research framework, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the factors influencing SCETs' decision to transition into ELT. A qualitative case study design is well-suited for examining complex phenomena in their real-life context, offering rich insights into the personal, social, and institutional factors shaping human experiences [16]. The research was conducted in a bustling city in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, a region characterized by a diverse range of schools, institutions, and participants from various professional backgrounds. This setting provides a unique opportunity to explore how complicated factors impact SCETs' career choices.

2.2. Research participants

Three participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the selection of individuals with specific characteristics relevant to the study's objectives [17]. The criteria were (1) coming from a non-education-related academic discipline and first career and (2) holding certifications relevant to ELT (Table 2).

Table 2. *Participants' demographic information*

Pseudonym – Age	Academic major – 1st career	1st career experience	Degree
Khoa (Male) – 28	Agriculture - Plant pathologist	1 year	TEFL Bachelor's
Uyen (Female) – 29	Marketing - Salesperson	1 year and a half	TEFL Master's
Quan (Male) – 33	Engineering - Graphic designer	3 year and a half	TEFL Master's

2.3. Research instruments

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were employed since this method allows for flexibility in probing deeper into the participants' experiences while maintaining consistency in the questions asked [18]. Semi-structured interviews are particularly effective for qualitative research because they enable researchers to explore specific areas of interest in greater depth, while also allowing for unanticipated insights through open-ended questioning [19]. Topics covered in the interviews included participants' prior career experiences, their reasons for choosing their first career and why they transition to teaching. Prior to data collection, the interview questions were piloted with a SCET from aquaculture background and refined with input from a field expert to ensure clarity and relevance. Afterwards, the interviews with Khoa (31 minutes), Uyen (38 minutes), and Quan (29 minutes) took place in the first, second, and third weeks of March 2025, respectively. Interviews were conducted ethically and confidentially, with

informed consent obtained and participants anonymized to protect privacy and uphold research integrity [20].

2.4. Data analysis

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying, analyzing, and reporting inductively-derived themes within data [21]. The interviews were transcribed verbatim in Vietnamese, coded and analyzed thematically. First, initial codes were generated to capture general concepts of influential factors. Second, these codes were reviewed and grouped into broader categories. Finally, themes were refined and defined to accurately represent the data. Direct quotes from participants were translated and incorporated to illustrate and support the emerging themes, adding authenticity and depth to the analysis [22]. To enhance credibility and confirmability, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with the participants, allowing them to confirm the accuracy of interpretations.

3. Results and Discussion

SCETs' transition decision in this study stems from an inextricably intertwined mix of personal realizations and contextual influences. Khoa, Uyen, and Quan each arrived at teaching through their distinct journeys, but several points were overlapped.

3.1. Misalignments between past career and personalities

Three teachers experienced a misalignment between their previous careers and their personalities. Khoa, who initially worked in the agricultural and laboratory sector, found his work isolating and overly technical, conflicting with his outgoing and socially engaged nature.

"I didn't enjoy sitting in a lab... staying completely quiet. Working with bacteria and fungi, those disease-causing molds,... couldn't breathe heavily, blow, or even talk. Saliva could contaminate the petri dishes [...] I prefer something more extroverted and community-oriented...." (Khoa, excerpt 1)

Uyen's marketing and sales roles, while dynamic, felt disconnected and overly transactional, lacking the ethics and genuine emotional depth she craved.

"In sales or any customer-focused field, I didn't truly feel the presence of care [...] Too focusing on measuring the final product can lead to unethical competition. [...]. I've witnessed people using deceptive strategies, advertising this but delivering that..." (Uyen, excerpt 2)

Quan, working in graphic design and web development, began to feel alienated. The creative freedom he once enjoyed felt increasingly mismatched with his desire for more meaningful and sustainable humanistic actualization.

"I don't like the idea of excluding others or being excluded. I'm looking for careers that are inclusive and sustainable for everyone to inspire others in overcoming weaknesses." (Quan, excerpt 3)

For all three, a growing disconnect between who they were and what they did spurred the desire for change, fitting well with the concept of "push-pull factors". In terms of push factors, their experiences reflect "critical identity moments" when professionals confront deep dissonance between their personal and work values [23]. Their self-awareness of mismatch also shows that individuals evaluate their past, present, and future goals to determine if profession aligns with their "true color" and question whether their current trajectories could offer lasting fulfillment [24]. Simultaneously, the appeal of ELT served as a powerful pull factor. For all three, teaching was not simply a career escape but a space to fulfill intrinsic desires of communicating meaningfully, sharing knowledge, and connecting with others. These motivations align with research by Hanington [25], which ascribes the interest for teaching career to social and intellectual provision. Each of their narratives emerged as a compelling

variant of the foundational patterns outlined by Coppe [26], who described SCTs as falling along a spectrum from those who were called to those who recalibrated their goals due to changing life conditions.

3.2. Sufficient English language proficiency

Three SCETs clearly demonstrated a sense of readiness, where their transition into teaching was driven not only by dissatisfaction with previous roles, but also by a strong sense of content knowledge readiness. Khoa developed a passion for English and strong communicative fluency through regular conversations with overseas relatives and active participation in English clubs. Uyen's love for English was inspired by a role model and reinforced by her frequent use of the language in her previous career.

"I often watch English-learning vlogs at home, especially by Miss Victoria, a business woman whom I admire for her success and English fluency. A previous job helped me handle bookings and selling farm-sourced organic products... I also taught cooking in English to foreigners." (Uyen, excerpt 2)

Quan, however, provides a subtle variation. He did not initially perceive himself as linguistically adept, nor was English a passion cultivated in school or leisure contexts. Instead, his proficiency developed organically and professionally, through years of reading technical documentation, handling international contracts, and designing bilingual content.

"I never liked English at first. I was forced to learn it because of work responsibilities and the need for extra income. I didn't realize I was getting good at it, it just became a habit to read and stay updated on new commands and prompts for apps and tools." (Quan, excerpt 3)

This type of incidental language acquisition, though less traditional, echoing previous findings that SCETs often carry latent language competencies from unexpected domains, which later become critical assets in their teaching identity [27]. Quan's experience illustrates that proficiency does not always precede the decision to teach, but may be realized through reflection on professional experiences. Together, these cases exemplify the term "self-efficacy in subject knowledge", which explain that SCTs pursue teaching when they perceive their skill sets as transferable, and language proficiency is often central in this self-assessment among ELT professionals [28]. They exhibited this alignment between previous experience and perceived language readiness, which made their career shift not only plausible but affirming. Sufficient English proficiency, whether nurtured through Khoa and Uyen's deliberate practice, or Quan's subconsciously accumulated over time in professional settings, forms a pivotal enabling condition in teacher transition to ELT.

3.3. Missing job opportunities for the first career

The lack of viable opportunities in their former careers played a pivotal role in Khoa, Uyen, and Quan's decisions to transition into ELT. In contrast to the earlier-discussed factors, this job scarcity was largely not under their control. For Khoa, even though he was offered a job in his original domain, the location was far from home and would have demanded excessive commuting.

"There was one time during a peak season when they were hiring long-term collaborators to sell newly imported plants and fertilizers. I had applied, but due to some unexpected issues from working conditions, I couldn't follow through, and that opportunity slipped away." (Khoa, excerpt 1)

Uyen experienced firsthand the precarity of business and marketing roles when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted her entrepreneurial ventures twice, exposing the fragility of her income source.

"COVID-19 appeared, and I had to suspend all my work in the city. When it burst out again a year later, I finally quit my job as a salesperson, my income was cut off. No more foreigner tourists or customers were available..." (Uyen, excerpt 2)

Likewise, Quan received fewer commissions and started to feel pushed out of the tech industry, where visual trends changed rapidly, and hiring increasingly favored younger professionals with up-to-date aesthetics and good health. These experiences strongly echo existing research that highlights "push factors" as partially central in shaping career changers' decision since such transitions are often initiated when individuals feel compelled to move away from unfavorable circumstances. In the same vein, research has mentioned that tangible barriers like location, economic volatility, and structural ageism actively constrained human career prospects [29]. In the cases of Khoa, Uyen, and Quan, the transitions observed here complement findings from Leshem et al. [30] that individuals often reflect on these external disruptions and reassess whether their current career path is feasible. Ultimately, these cases illustrate that SCETs' transitions are also driven by external constraints that render their former professions unprofitable.

3.4. Encouragement and invitation for job transition

While their motivations were in part shaped by personal reflection, the social scaffolding around them proved crucial in legitimizing their shift into ELT. Khoa's decision was reinforced by a senior in his English club, an informal mentor whose encouragement carried weight within hierarchy-oriented culture. His story shows how peer networks in extracurricular spaces can offer both camaraderie and catalysts for career redirection. Uyen's case showed the enduring influence of familial advice in the participants' society. Her parents' concerns for job stability, especially in the wake of the pandemic, carried emotional and moral authority, reflecting collectivist tradition where intergenerational care extends into career decision-making for females. This echoes findings that teaching is often seen as a suitable job for women due to its nurturing nature, reinforcing gendered expectations in career choices [31]. Comparably, the counsel of a retired bank director, respected for social capital, added weight to her decision by advising her to choose a more stable job than a tour salesperson. In collectivist cultures, successful figures often act as gatekeepers, granting permission to take risks or reshape one's identity. In the same vein, Quan's turning point came through a conversation with his uncle about career consultation.

"I was gradually replaced by younger designers who were more tech-savvy and had stronger aesthetic skills. My dear uncle advised me that if I didn't want to be forgotten, I should find a way to share my knowledge with others, so I tried to become a teacher as a way to create meaningful impacts."

In the research setting, the generational custom of giving back, passing down wisdom, and maintaining social relevance aligns closely with Confucian ideals, which uphold education and communal responsibility as enduring social virtues. These findings extend the insights of Hogg et al. [29], whose discussions of encouragement among second-career teachers significantly involves individual interpretations of outsider support. In the research setting, however, encouragement frequently takes the form of an external prompt to function as a socio-cultural mandate that facilitates, or even compels the transition into teaching. Similar patterns have been observed in findings of Nguyen [32] on pre-service teachers and education-major students, who often frame their career choice through this collective lens.

4. Conclusion

This study's findings reveal four key themes influencing SCETs' career shifts, each of which carries important implications for supporting career changers entering the ELT profession. First, career counseling services should integrate personality and value-based assessments to help professionals identify teaching as a viable alternative. Teacher recruitment could emphasize the social and communicative aspects of ELT, making it more appealing to those who thrive in collaborative and meaningful work environments. Second, English

language proficiency emerged as a critical enabler for transition, indicating the need for tailored language enhancement programs for career changers to bridge the gap between general fluency and pedagogical application. Training institutions could offer preparatory courses focusing on classroom language use for SCETs to assimilate or adapt their linguistic skills. Third, more supportive pathways for professionals transition should be improved, possibly including accelerated certification programs, financial incentives, or job placement assistance. By mitigating structural barriers, educational systems can target a more diverse pool of candidates who otherwise struggle in volatile job markets. Finally, to leverage social and cultural encouragement, institutions could establish mentorship programs pairing experienced teachers with career changers. Public awareness campaigns could value SCETs' diverse backgrounds to help normalize teaching as a rewarding second career. In conclusion, understanding the pull factors is paramount, as ELT related stakeholders have the power to proactively attract and welcome career changers into the field. By recognizing the impacts of external factors, responsibilities could be more effectively distributed to pull more qualified transitions. While the push factors in past jobs are beyond the control in dictating SCETs' decisions, they still provide important lessons for avoiding similar challenges in ELT. The ultimate goal should not only be to bring SCETs into ELT but also to support their long-term commitment and sustainability within the profession.

This study offers important insights into SCETs' transition into ELT, but it is not without limitations. The small, region-specific sample may restrict the transferability of findings out of the Mekong Delta context. Reliance on retrospective self-reports introduces potential recall bias, and the focus on the decision-making phase overlooks long-term teaching experiences. Future research could adopt longitudinal, mixed-methods designs with larger, more diverse samples to better capture the evolving impact of career-change-related factors. Further exploration into the subsequent phases of mediation and commitment, as well as institutional policies and professional development, is promising to strengthen SCETs' retention and professional growth. Comparative studies with first-career teachers could also illuminate the distinct contributions and challenges SCETs bring to ELT.

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