Research on the Identity Construction of Graduate Admissions Officer — Based on Auto-Ethnography

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Abstract: In the context of the new era, quality assurance, scale growth, and structural optimization are the focus and challenges of recruitment work. This study is based on the perspective of graduate admissions officer and focuses on the identity construction process of administrative personnel in graduate enrollment work, exploring the identity recognition of graduate admissions officer before and after entering the research and recruitment work. During the performance of their job functions, graduate admissions officer gradually realizes the social role and responsibility that graduate admissions officer endows themselves with, and pays attention to educational equity and procedural justice in enrollment work. The construction of the identity of graduate admissions officer is influenced by the environment, self-awareness, and social evaluation, and in the process of constructing this identity, it also reflects the problems existing in the current graduate enrollment work and system. Based on these issues, some suggestions are proposed to enhance the effectiveness and fairness of graduate enrollment work.

Keywords: Recruitment work; University administration; Identity construction; Educational equity; Ethnography

1. Proposal of research questions

1.1 Research Background

Since entering the new era, China's graduate admissions work has expanded, highlighting talent selection, economic growth, high-quality development, and social innovation. These roles, formed through educational reform, fulfill party and national goals by fostering high-level talent and promoting the interaction between education and social development[1-2].

1.2 Research Questions

This study uses ethnography to explore the identity formation of graduate admissions staff, focusing on admissions standards, transparency, and policy flexibility to reveal challenges in the system and provide guidance for its reform.

(1) How is the "admissions officer" identity formed during the graduate admissions process?

(2) How do policies and regulations impact this identity?

(3) What systemic issues are reflected in the identity formation process?

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Identity Construction Perspective

Identity construction is shaped by social interactions and cultural context. Constructivism highlights language and symbols in identity formation, emphasizing social interaction as crucial for building meaning and identity[3]. This framework aids in understanding how the "admissions officer" identity forms and reflects current admissions practices.

2.2 Symbolic Interactionism Perspective

In symbolic interactionism, concepts like "setting," "I," and "me" explain identity construction in social interactions. In varying admissions contexts, admissions staff balance internal self-perception ("I") and external roles ("me") to shape their identity and behavior[4].

2.3 Research Methods and Process

This study adopts an autoethnographic approach to explore identity formation among graduate admissions staff. Ethnography involves deep participant observation and a comprehensive understanding of cultural and social contexts[5]. Autoethnography links personal experience with culture, examining self-experiences through dual insider-outsider perspectives to convey self-awareness[6]. I participated in various admissions tasks, such as promotion, selection, and interviews, documenting personal reflections and conducting in-depth interviews with colleagues to analyze shared patterns

and reveal identity-related issues in admissions practices.

3. Research Conclusions and Analysis

3.1 A Year in Admissions — Annual Work Planning

Graduate admissions work follows an annual cycle, with high demands on human resources due to paper-based exams and annual admissions expansion[7]. The work is intense, especially near exam periods, involving numerous tasks at a brisk pace, as outlined below.

Table 1. Key tasks during different periods

Time Period	Key Tasks
Planning (May-Jul)	Finalize prior admissions; allocate quotas; start summer camp; assign roles.
Promotion (Aug-Sep)	Conduct summer camp; external promotion; prepare online registration info.
Exams (Oct-Dec)	Arrange exams; prepare test papers; handle qualification checks.
Results & Re-exam (Feb-Apr)	Grade and publish scores; set and announce score lines; manage re-exams.

3.2 Becoming an "Admissions Officer" — Identity Formation

3.2.1 A University Administrator

In this stage, identity is built through imagination and recognition before active social interactions. For an "admissions officer" like me, it meant imagining and anticipating the responsibilities of my role. This included excitement about contributing to the university by selecting top talent and shaping my career. Before starting this role, I was aware of my identity as a university administrator, feeling a sense of mission to select qualified graduate students to meet both personal and institutional goals. I also reflected on my skills, seeking self-improvement to meet the demands of the position.

3.2.2 An Admissions Practitioner

This stage involves identity development through practice and interaction. I engaged with students, colleagues, superiors, and other staff, solving admissions issues collaboratively, enriching my professional identity and personal growth. Key tasks included answering student queries clearly, coordinating with colleagues to complete tasks, and consulting leadership on unresolved issues. These interactions honed my professionalism, communication, teamwork, and organizational abilities. Through participation in promotion activities and training, I expanded my network and knowledge of admissions trends across institutions, enhancing my comprehensive skills and identity as an admissions professional.

3.2.3 A Responsible "Admissions Officer"

Self-reflection involves scrutinizing one's sense of responsibility. An "admissions officer" like me undertakes a mission to ensure educational equity and procedural fairness in selecting future academic and professional elites[8-9]. Responsibility shapes our identity; through self-assessment, we become more effective, fulfilling both personal and societal goals. For instance, when I noticed grading errors, I sought immediate correction, earning leadership recognition. Another time, a mistake in scheduling required corrective efforts. These experiences emphasized the importance of accountability. Reflecting on whether I fully commit to admissions, prioritize students' interests, and uphold educational fairness became central to my self-concept. Responsibility also extends to my career development, with a commitment to growth, aligning personal and institutional goals to advance both educational quality and my professional identity.

3.3 Factors Affecting Identity Formation

3.3.1 Context: School and Office

"Context" includes the working environment, such as the academic admissions office, which shapes identity. Here, admissions officers interact with students, colleagues, and supervisors, handling various tasks under different conditions. The organizational culture and office dynamics deeply influence one's work style, values, and attitudes.

3.3.2 "I": Self-Constructed Cognition

"I" refers to the self-perception that individuals form through social interactions. Admissions officers develop a sense of responsibility and mission by recognizing their role in selecting and nurturing future talent. Through ongoing exchanges with students and colleagues, they adjust their work approach and communication style, further solidifying their professional identity.

3.3.3 "Me": Key Interpersonal Interactions

"Me" represents identity shaped through interactions. In exchanges with students, colleagues, and superiors, admissions

officers not only define their professional image but also receive recognition from others. Student trust reinforces confidence and professional pride, while support and affirmation from colleagues and superiors further confirm their role, driving them to uphold admissions responsibilities. Family and friends' expectations also significantly impact this identity formation process.

The elements of context, "I", and "me" profoundly influence the identity formation of admissions officers. Through continual involvement in admissions work and interaction with others, they not only establish self-recognition but also gain external validation, reinforcing their professional identity.

4. Reflections and Suggestions

4.1 Reflections on Graduate Admissions Work

4.1.1 Rigid Identity of "Admissions Officer" — Institutional Rigidity Under Administrative Control

In China's universities, graduate admissions committees are key decision-making bodies, comprising administrators and faculty but dominated by administrative power. Academic authority is often secondary, limiting professors' roles to procedural execution rather than policy decisions[10]. This administrative-led model restricts flexibility and stifles identity expression among admissions staff.

4.1.2 Identity Erosion Amid "High-Quality Talent" Goals

The system prioritizes students' academic "background," reducing identity formation to mechanical compliance with fixed criteria[11-12]. Staff feel powerless to alter the system, leading to frustration and weakening their professional identity.

4.1.3 Challenges in Digital Promotion in Admissions

The pandemic accelerated online admissions promotion, yet many universities lack effective online strategies, creating information gaps and increased competition for top students[13]. Admissions staff face challenges in adapting swiftly to new digital demands.

4.2 Suggestions for Admissions

4.2.1 Balance of Power for Scientific Admissions

Empowering academic committees can counterbalance administrative dominance, enabling fairer selection based on professors' expertise[14-15].

4.2.2 Diversified Promotion and Assessment

Admissions should blend online and offline channels, while flexible criteria ensure fair evaluation, enhancing the quality of admissions outcomes[16].

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