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## Role Positioning of Internal Journal Editors, Journal Quality, and Post-prints

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### Abstract

Editors of internal academic journals serve as crucial guarantors of journal quality. Due to policy orientation, editors' professional competence, and management concepts, problems of unclear role positioning and low self-identity among editors have emerged, affecting the improvement of journal quality. Proposed solutions include emphasizing editor training and appropriate incentives, piloting a section editor system, bringing in external expertise while facilitating outward exchanges, improving guidance policies, and creating high-quality columns, thereby promoting editors to form appropriate role positioning and boosting journal quality improvement.

### Full Text

## Role Positioning of Internal Journal Editors and Journal Quality

**Abstract:** Internal journal editors serve as crucial guarantors of publication quality. However, due to policy orientations, editors' professional competencies, and management philosophies, these editors often face unclear role positioning and low self-identity, which ultimately hinders quality improvement. This paper proposes several measures to address these challenges: emphasizing editor training and appropriate incentives, piloting a column editor responsibility system, implementing "bringing in" and "going out" strategies, improving guidance policies, and creating distinguished columns. These initiatives aim to foster appropriate role positioning among editors and thereby boost journal quality.

**Keywords:** internal academic journals; editor role positioning; journal quality

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## 1. The Relationship Between Editor Role Positioning and Journal Quality

Qualified journal editors are essential for ensuring manuscript quality and elevating academic standards. Internal journals primarily publish articles written by institutional faculty, yet they consistently suffer from insufficient submissions and mediocre quality. In this context, editors become the critical safeguard for publication quality through four key functions: first, maintaining political correctness by preventing the publication of content with erroneous political viewpoints or policies that contravene Party principles; second, leveraging editorial vigilance to identify and avoid manuscripts with potential academic misconduct; third, providing clear revision guidance for acceptable submissions through expert peer review; and fourth, delivering high-level proofreading and refinement during final manuscript preparation. As the adage goes, “a stable, excellent editorial team determines the academic level and quality of a journal.” Indeed, editors constitute the soul of internal journals and represent the key to publication standards and overall quality.

## 2. Current Role Positioning of Internal Journal Editors and Its Underlying Causes

Despite their vital role in safeguarding journal quality, most internal journal editors suffer from low self-identity and unclear role positioning. Their approach to editorial work tends to be passive and reactive rather than proactive, significantly impeding journal development. Several factors contribute to this situation:

### 2.1 Institutional Policy Orientation and Low Priority for Journals

Most higher vocational college journals were established relatively recently and have short publication histories. Due to budget constraints and staffing limitations, internal journals typically operate without independent editorial offices or publishing houses. Instead, they are usually affiliated with administrative departments such as research offices, academic affairs offices, or higher education research institutes, functioning as subordinate units within these bureaucratic structures. Consequently, the vast majority of internal journal editors work part-time, holding primary positions in these administrative departments while simultaneously shouldering editorial responsibilities. They must squeeze editorial tasks into already limited schedules after completing routine administrative work, resulting in time pressures, heavy workloads, and virtually no incentive policies. Editorial work is treated merely as an administrative assignment, leading to low enthusiasm and quality in publication efforts.

### 2.2 Part-Time Editors' Lack of Professionalism Limits Journal Quality

The absence of full-time professional editors means that most part-time editors are “amateurs” who apply limited editorial knowledge and skills to academic pub-

lishing. This constraint affects their ability to maintain publication standards and ensure developmental quality. Moreover, the pressure of daily administrative duties, combined with the time-sensitive nature of publishing, leaves these already constrained editors with little energy to pursue editorial training or continuing education opportunities. The situation is further exacerbated by chronic challenges with manuscript sources and article quality, which deprive editors of any sense of achievement or professional pride, further diminishing their work passion and eliminating any possibility of initiative or innovation.

### **2.3 Limited Manuscript Sources and Overall Low Quality**

Journal managers typically position internal journals as “private plots” for showcasing their institution’s research achievements. With already limited operational funds—often allocated as part of broader research budgets—resources must be directed toward publishing faculty research outputs. As a result, many internal journals refuse external submissions, focusing exclusively on internal contributions. While this protects opportunities for institutional faculty, it creates two major drawbacks: severe manuscript shortages and questionable quality. Manuscript quantity and quality constitute the lifeblood of any journal and represent the most critical factors influencing journal development. Over-reliance on internal submissions not only creates a perpetual state of scarcity—where editors struggle to “select the best from the available” rather than “select the best from the excellent”—but also restricts exposure to external academic ideas, severely limiting the journal’s function as an academic exchange platform.

The overall quality of these publications remains low. Most higher vocational colleges evolved from secondary vocational schools and have relatively short histories as higher education institutions. Faculty academic levels are limited, and newly recruited teachers lack substantial academic accumulation. The institutional academic atmosphere is not sufficiently robust, resulting in a scarcity of high-level, high-quality articles. While submissions on teaching experience and classroom reform are common, innovative research on institutional specialties or advantages—theoretical or practical—remains lacking.

### **2.4 Superficial Column Construction and Lack of Sustainability**

Column construction in internal journals requires significant improvement. Compared with undergraduate institutions, higher vocational colleges have distinctive characteristics that should be reflected in their publications. However, analysis reveals that most internal journal columns mirror those of conventional university journals—“Humanities and Social Sciences,” “Education and Teaching,” “Technology and Application,” “Economic Management”—offering little distinctive competitiveness or innovation. Some journals have attempted to feature columns reflecting institutional specialties, such as the “Food Culture” and “Three Rural Issues” research columns in our college’s journal (Zhejiang Agricultural Business Vocational College), which align closely with agricultural programs like culinary technology, nutrition, and

rural cooperative management. While these distinctive columns add highlights, their operation is even more concerning: overly specialized research directions and small target audiences often result in only one or two articles per issue, or even none at all, preventing continuous operation and frequently taking columns “offline.” This undermines the continuity and developmental potential of specialized columns.

### **3. External Introduction and Internal Training: Promoting Rational Editor Role Positioning**

#### **3.1 Emphasizing Editorial Training and Appropriate Incentives**

Since internal journal editors are primarily part-time without systematic editorial theory or practical education, regular participation in industry training becomes essential. Periodic knowledge updates and awareness of publishing industry developments and trends can inject vitality and energy into sustainable journal development. Institutional administrators should permit and encourage editors to attend editorial training seminars organized by journal associations or relevant institutions to continuously enhance their capabilities. Additionally, as editorial work represents a “second job” for part-time editors, the lack of compensation diminishes their motivation. Journal managers should stimulate editorial drive through various incentive mechanisms, including training opportunities and performance-based rewards.

#### **3.2 Exploring a Featured Column Editor Responsibility System**

Severe staffing shortages in internal journal editorial teams necessitate maximizing editorial efficiency and timeliness within existing structures. Creating distinctive columns represents a primary strategy for higher vocational internal journals to “stand out” and “shine.” However, current part-time editors (typically only 1-2 people) have narrow professional backgrounds, making successful development of institutional specialty columns difficult. Implementing a column editor responsibility system can effectively address this challenge. Institutional managers should invite relevant department heads (program directors) to serve as column editors based on specialty column distribution. Leveraging their matching professional backgrounds and solid research foundations, these column editors can help correctly orient column development while utilizing their professional networks to secure manuscript sources. Institutions must explore incentive measures for column editors, such as performance rewards, recognition of research workload, or other appropriate forms of compensation to ensure successful implementation.

#### **3.3 Combining “Bringing In” and “Going Out” Strategies**

The classic reform strategy of “bringing in” and “going out” applies equally to internal journal development. “Bringing in” refers to increasing the use of external manuscripts, a crucial pathway to enhancing journal influence. While

maintaining internal focus, journals should expand external recruitment efforts and publish a reasonable proportion of external submissions, truly transforming the journal into a cooperative and exchange platform for relevant professions and industries both within and beyond the institution. “Going out” refers to strengthening exchanges and cooperation with other journals, learning from excellent provincial and national publications about editorial experience, and using these insights to guide internal journal reform and development under existing constraints. Simultaneously, based on sufficient exchange, journals should implement manuscript source sharing, recommending excellent internal manuscripts to cooperating external publications. This打通s circulation channels between internal and external journals, helping institutional faculty publish their research while enhancing the internal journal’s reputation in the publishing field and enriching its academic exchange functions.

### **3.4 Improving Guidance Policies to Enhance Journal Recognition**

As windows and platforms for academic achievement display and exchange, internal journals face an awkward discrepancy between their “high positioning” in principle and “low status” in practice. This relates to institutional guidance policies: for a long time, most higher vocational college administrators have focused primary energy on the institution’s main developmental tasks, considering internal journals as merely “icing on the cake” rather than urgent or important. At this new developmental stage, higher vocational colleges should improve guidance policies, with the primary task being to enhance internal recognition of their journals. Measures such as increasing research credit for journal articles or requiring college-level research project outputs to be published in the internal journal before submission to external publications can gradually address the problem of low recognition.

### **3.5 Building Quality Columns and Pursuing a Characteristic, Application-Oriented Publication Route**

Facing the turbulent journal industry, internal journals must deeply consider how to establish themselves as an academic “clear stream” within the vast publication landscape. To break through the encirclement, demonstrate value and characteristics, and distinguish themselves from conventional university journals and specialized academic publications, internal journals should adhere to a characteristic publication route through quality column development. This approach can enhance recognition and reputation while further improving academic quality and value. The key to building quality columns lies in being institutionally grounded, regionally radiating, and long-term planned. Taking our college (Zhejiang Agricultural Business Vocational College) as an example, as the province’s only agriculture-focused higher vocational institution with strong “three rural issues” characteristics, we can add columns in relevant specialty areas—such as “Cooperative Research,” “Green Food Research,” and “Tea Research” —while further developing existing distinctive columns like “ ‘Three Rural Issues’ Re-

search” and “Food Culture/Food Science.” By deepening exchanges with related institutions and securing submissions from teachers and experts in these niche fields, we can gradually form stable author and reviewer networks, enhancing the column’s influence within its research domain and achieving an appropriate emphasis on “niche characteristics” alongside “universal relevance.”

Editors constitute the lifeline of journal quality, with editor role positioning and journal quality mutually reinforcing and influencing each other. In the publication process, internal journals should emphasize editors’ self-positioning and promote rational role formation by improving current operational models. Only through positive, proactive editor role positioning can internal journals advance against challenges and explore distinctive development paths suited to their circumstances.

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