DONG THAP UNIVERSITY JOURNAL OF SCIENCE
Tạp chí Khoa học Đại học Đồng Tháp
Social Sciences and Humanities Issue
ISSN 0866-7675 | e-ISSN 2815-567X

DOI: https://doi.org/10.52714/dthu.14.7.2025.1631

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC ADVISING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE MEKONG DELTA

Cao Dao Thep

Dong Thap University, Cao Lanh 870000, Vietnam

Email: cdthep@dthu.edu.vn

Article history

Received: 07/7/2025; Received in revised form: 17/8/2025; Accepted: 03/9/2025

Abstract

Amid the modernization and international integration of Vietnamese higher education, academic advising is increasingly recognized as pivotal to enhancing educational quality and supporting students' holistic development. This study investigates the management of academic advising in universities across the Mekong Delta, drawing on responses from 1030 participants, including administrators, faculty serving as academic advisors, and students. Data were collected via a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire grounded in the NACADA Competency Framework, supplemented by in-depth interviews to strengthen reliability and interpretive validity. Findings indicate that, although an advising management system is in place, notable gaps remain: unclear planning criteria and limited use of technology; inconsistent implementation alongside insufficient faculty support; and monitoring and evaluation that are neither data-driven nor systematically linked to annual improvement. Using the PDCA cycle as a guiding framework, the study proposes management solutions emphasizing process standardization, digital transformation, and advisor capacity development, thereby enhancing institutional effectiveness and offering policy implications for the Ministry of Education and Training.

Keywords: *Academic advising, advisor competencies, advising management, Mekong Delta.*

Cite: Cao, D. T. (2025). An empirical study on the management of academic advising in higher education institutions in the Mekong Delta. *Dong Thap University Journal of Science, 14*(7), 105-120. https://doi.org/10.52714/dthu.14.7.2025.1631

NGHIÊN CỨU THỰC TIỄN QUẢN LÝ HOẠT ĐỘNG CỐ VẤN HỌC TẬP TẠI CÁC TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC VÙNG ĐỒNG BẰNG SÔNG CỬU LONG

Cao Dao Thép

Trường Đại học Đồng Tháp, Việt Nam

Email: cdthep@dthu.edu.vn

Lịch sử bài báo

Ngày nhận: 07/7/2025; Ngày nhận chỉnh sửa: 17/8/2025; Ngày duyệt đăng: 03/9/2025

Tóm tắt

Trong bối cảnh giáo dục đại học Việt Nam hiện đại hóa và hội nhập quốc tế, hoạt động cố vấn học tập ngày càng giữ vai trò then chốt trong nâng cao chất lượng đào tạo và hỗ trợ sự phát triển toàn diện của sinh viên. Nghiên cứu này khảo sát thực tiễn quản lý công tác cố vấn học tập tại các trường đại học vùng Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long với 1030 đối tượng tham gia, bao gồm cán bộ quản lý, giảng viên kiêm nhiệm cố vấn học tập và sinh viên. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua bảng hỏi Likert 5 mức dựa trên khung năng lực NACADA, kết hợp phỏng vấn sâu nhằm tăng cường độ tin cậy và giá trị giải thích. Kết quả chỉ ra rằng hệ thống quản lý cố vấn học tập đã bước đầu được hình thành nhưng còn tồn tại nhiều hạn chế: thiếu tiêu chí rõ ràng và ứng dụng công nghệ trong hoạch định; triển khai chưa đồng bộ, chính sách hỗ trợ giảng viên còn hạn chế; giám sát và đánh giá chưa dựa trên dữ liệu và chưa gắn với cải tiến thường niên. Trên cơ sở tiếp cận chu trình PDCA, nghiên cứu đề xuất các giải pháp quản lý theo hướng chuẩn hóa quy trình, thúc đẩy chuyển đổi số, bồi dưỡng năng lực cố vấn học tập, qua đó góp phần nâng cao hiệu quả quản lý ở cấp trường và cung cấp hàm ý chính sách cho Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo.

Từ khóa: *Cố vấn học tập, Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long, năng lực cố vấn học tập, quản lý hoạt động cố vấn.*

1. Introduction

Vietnamese higher education is undergoing modernization, autonomy, and international integration, with quality enhancement as a strategic priority. The digital transformation context requires universities to reform governance, restructure student support, and improve efficiency (Nguyen et al., 2023). Policy frameworks, such as Decision No. 131/QĐ-TTg (Prime Minister, 2022), identify digital transformation as a breakthrough solution for building a flexible and sustainable learning ecosystem.

International research also highlights how technology reshapes student behaviors and advising needs (Gaines, 2014). Academic advising is central to student support, linking programs with learning and career aspirations (Robbins, 2013), while integrating academic, psychosocial, and career guidance (Kuhn et al., 2006). Advising quality strongly influences engagement, satisfaction, and success (Smith & Allen, 2014), and helps reduce attrition and raise graduation rates (Tinto, 1993). Thus, advising should be recognized as a core element of higher education quality management.

In Vietnam, the advising task has accompanied the credit-based system but faces persistent limitations, especially in Mekong Delta universities. Advisors struggle with competency standards, coordination, and policy support (Nguyen, 2022); organizational models are unclear, collaboration is fragmented, and monitoring remains formalistic (Vo, 2015). According to MOET (2023), only 10–12% of lecturers concurrently serve as advisors in this region, while the student–faculty ratio is 35–40:1, undermining support quality (Robbins, 2013).

Strengthening advisor capacity and improving management are therefore urgent. Recent initiatives remain isolated within individual institutions (Pham & Cao, 2023), with no region-wide studies. Meanwhile, internationalization pressures universities to enhance advising effectiveness to attract and retain students and meet workforce demands (UNESCO, 2021). Guided by the NACADA framework (2017)—policy and structure, processes and digital tools, capacity development, and monitoring and evaluation—this study aims to: (1) analyze current advising organization and operations; (2) identify influencing factors; and (3) propose directions to improve management in Mekong Delta universities in the context of digital transformation.

2. Research methods

This study investigated the management of academic advising activities in universities across the Mekong Delta region. A descriptive survey design was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analyses. This mixed-methods approach not only offers a comprehensive overview of the current state of academic advising but also examines the factors affecting management effectiveness, thereby providing evidence-based recommendations.

2.1. Research design

The study employed a descriptive survey design to capture key characteristics, trends, and relationships among variables, while integrating qualitative data to enrich the interpretation of quantitative findings.

2.2. Participants and sample

The study involved three participant groups: 260 administrators, 370 faculty members serving concurrently as academic advisors, and 400 students. These groups were chosen as they represent those who manage, deliver, or directly benefit from advising services. Stratified random sampling across institutions and participant groups produced 1,030 valid responses, ensuring representativeness.

2.3. Instruments and measurement scales

The main instrument was a structured questionnaire developed from the NACADA (2017) competency framework for academic advisors and supplemented by relevant Vietnamese studies. It covered four domains: (1) policies and management structures; (2) processes and support tools; (3) advisor competencies; and (4) monitoring and evaluation. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A pilot test with 30 participants confirmed the instrument's reliability, requiring only minor linguistic revisions.

2.4. Data collection procedure

Data were collected between May and December 2024 through both face-to-face surveys and online distribution (Google Forms). Voluntary participation and anonymity were ensured to safeguard the data objectivity. In addition, in-depth interviews with selected administrators and faculty members explored issues such as coordination mechanisms, faculty competencies, and the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation practices.

2.5. Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed in Excel using descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviation) and group comparisons. Qualitative interview data were thematically analyzed to complement and explain the quantitative results, thereby strengthening the study's interpretive value.

2.6. Methodological limitations

The study was limited to 6 of the 17 universities in the Mekong Delta region; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire system. In addition, the descriptive survey design primarily identifies correlations rather than causal relationships. Despite these limitations, the large sample size and the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods applied by this study provide practical insights and robust evidence to inform the Results and Discussion section.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Theoretical foundations and literature review on academic advising

3.1.1. Concept and objectives

Academic advising is central to student support in higher education. Kuhn (2008) defines it as long-term guidance fostering autonomy and adaptability, while NACADA (2006) emphasizes its pedagogical role in helping students set goals, develop skills, and access resources. Unlike short-term counseling, advising is developmental, integrating academic, psychosocial, and career support (Kuhn et al., 2006). High-quality advising enhances engagement, satisfaction, and retention (Smith & Allen, 2014). Its objectives are threefold: (1) guiding students in designing study plans aligned with career goals (Tinto, 1993); (2) fostering autonomy and skills in time management, research, and problem-solving; and (3) promoting integration into academic and social life to improve persistence and completion (Astin, 1999; Kuhn, 2008).

3.1.2. Management of advising activities

Advising management can be framed around four components. First, policies and structures: coherent policies, clear roles, and centralized coordination reduce fragmentation (Drake, 2011). Second, processes and digital tools: standardized procedures and integrated data systems improve transparency and progress tracking (NACADA, 2017). Third, advisor capacity: faculty often lacks expertise in psychology, career guidance, and technology, while training and incentives remain limited (Vo, 2015; Nguyen, 2022). Fourth, monitoring and evaluation: focus should shift from counting sessions to assessing outcomes, engagement, and

satisfaction through surveys and data analytics (Smith & Allen, 2014).

3.1.3. Dominant models

Three dominant models shape advising. The developmental model views advising as collaboration for holistic growth and self-responsibility (Crookston, 1972). The proactive model emphasizes advisors' initiative in monitoring progress and intervening early, especially for first-year or at-risk students (King, 2008). The learner-centered model, rooted in constructivism, positions students as active agents while advisors act as facilitators (Ender et al., 1984). In Vietnam, advising often blends these models but remains largely administrative, with weak personal development focus and no standardized frameworks (Vo, 2015; Nguyen & Dang, 2019).

3.1.4. International competency frameworks

NACADA (2017) identifies three competency domains: Knowledge (curricula, regulations, policies, and student development); Skills (communication, counseling, record management, technology, collaboration); and Attitudes/Dispositions (support, professionalism, cultural respect, and holistic commitment). Standardized competencies improve professionalism and advising quality (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Robbins, 2013). In the digital era, technological proficiency, especially in learning management systems (LMS), is indispensable (Gaines, 2014). Vietnam lacks a unified framework; institutional standards remain fragmented, and faculty advisors often lack counseling and career guidance skills (Nguyen, 2022; Pham & Cao, 2023). Adapting international frameworks to the Mekong Delta context is strategic for strengthening advising management amid reform and integration.

3.1.5. Research gaps in the Mekong Delta

In Vietnam, most studies address single institutions or faculty competencies (Vo, 2015; Pham & Cao, 2023). Case studies, such as at Kien Giang University, examine advisor capacity (Nguyen, 2022), but cross-institutional analyses of advising management in the Mekong Delta are absent. The region's rural student backgrounds, limited resources, and climate vulnerability heighten needs for academic, psychosocial, and career support, yet current systems inadequately respond. This underscores the urgency of region-wide empirical studies on four dimensions of management: policy, processes, advisor capacity, and monitoring and evaluation, as universities face increasing challenges.

3.2. Academic advising personnel in the Mekong Delta universities

Academic advising has been implemented in universities across the Mekong Delta in conjunction with the credit-based training system. Survey results indicate that a total of 1,106 faculty members concurrently serve as advisors in six representative universities in the region. The distribution varies considerably: Can Tho University has the largest advising staff with 420 faculty members, while smaller institutions such as Bac Lieu University and Kien Giang University employ only about 100 - 115. These differences reflect variations in institutional scale, student enrollment, and organizational structures, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Gender and age distribution of academic advisors in six Mekong Delta universities

No	University	Number of advisors	Gender		Age			
			Mail	Female	30 <	31 - 40	41 - 50	> 50
1	Dong Thap University	211	96 (45%)	115 (54%)	60 (28%)	105 (50%)	35 (17)	11 (5%)

No	University	Number of advisors	Gender		Age			
			Mail	Female	30 <	31 - 40	41 - 50	> 50
2	Can Tho University	420	180 (42%)	240 (57%)	110 (27%)	220 (52%)	60 (30%)	30 (7%)
3	Kien Giang University	115	45 (39%)	70 (61%)	28 (25%)	54 (48%)	20 (17%)	12 (10)
4	Bac Lieu University	105	39 (37%)	66 (63%)	35 (33%)	42 (40%)	18 (17%)	10 (10%)
5	Can Tho University of Technology	120	55 (46%)	65 (54%)	40 (33%)	54 (45%)	15 (12%)	11 (10%)
6	Vinh Long University of Technology and Education	135	60 (44%)	75 (56%)	35 (26%)	60 (44%)	25 (19)	15 (11%)
	Total	**1106**	**475 (43%)**	**631 (57%)**	**308 (28%)**	**535 (48)**	**173 (16)**	**89 (8%)**

Female advisors form the majority in the Mekong Delta, with 631 individuals (57%) compared to 475 males (43%). At Bac Lieu and Kien Giang Universities, females account for over 60%, while at larger institutions such as Can Tho and Dong Thap the ratio is more balanced (males 42-45%). This predominance reflects qualities often associated with effective advising, including empathy, patience, and communication.

In terms of age, the largest group is 31-40 years (48%), followed by those under 30 (28%) and 41-50 (16%). Advisors over 50 constitute only 8%, showing that the workforce is predominantly young and adaptable to digital transformation. However, the limited number of senior advisors with extensive expertise highlights the need for ongoing professional development and succession planning to combine pedagogical competence with experience and psychosocial insight.

In summary, Mekong Delta universities exhibit two features: (1) females constitute the majority of advisors, and (2) the workforce is relatively young, concentrated in the 31-40 age group. These characteristics suggest strong potential for future development but also call for strategies in training, professional growth, and career advancement to ensure sustainable effectiveness in advising.

3.3. Practices of academic advising in universities of the Mekong Delta

3.3.1. Content of academic advising activities

Academic advising in Mekong Delta universities covers five main domains: academic support, research guidance, career orientation, skill development, and personal support. Survey results show that implementation varies across domains, with stronger emphasis on basic academic functions than on developmental roles.

Table 2 presents students' evaluations of academic support activities, including guidance on study planning, course selection, and progress monitoring. Table 3 summarizes student assessments of research guidance, career orientation, skill development, and personal support.

Table 2. Current practices of advising support for academic and research activities

No.	Area of support	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rank
1	Advising on program goals and course selection aligned with students' abilities and career orientation	3.44	1.07	4
2	Guiding students in developing personalized study plans for each semester	3.67	0.95	1
3	Assisting in the use of online academic management systems: searching, registration, and adjustment	3.42	1.07	5
4	Advising on learning methods and scientific research, enhancing critical thinking and research capacity	3.50	1.02	3
5	Monitoring academic performance; timely advising on registration, withdrawal, or course adjustment to ensure progress	3.58	0.93	2
6	Advising on double-degree programs, grade improvement, or academic recovery, ensuring compliance with regulations	3.04	0.89	8
7	Supporting internship placement, thesis topic selection, and career orientation relevant to majors	3.27	0.88	7
8	Implementing targeted advising programs for at-risk students, offering remedial solutions to maintain progress	3.38	0.86	6

Table 3. Current practices of advising activities

No	Area of advising	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rank
1	Advising on study planning, course selection, and progress monitoring	3.71	0.89	1
2	Advising on effective study methods, resource use, and time management	3.52	0.87	4
3	Guiding research methods, report writing, and thesis preparation	3.64	0.89	2
4	Advising on career orientation, job application skills, and career choices	3.55	0.94	3
5	Supporting soft-skill development, teamwork, and adaptation to university life	3.51	0.96	5

Based on the data in Tables 2 and 3, the strengths, limitations, and trends in academic advising activities in Mekong Delta universities can be identified. Advising remains oriented mainly toward basic academic functions. The indicators "Guiding students in developing personalized study plans" ($\overline{X}$ = 3.67; SD = 0.95) and "Advising on study planning, course selection, and progress monitoring" ($\overline{X}$ = 3.71; SD = 0.89) achieved the highest scores, showing that advisors prioritize supporting students' academic progress in line with credit-based requirements.

Support for scientific research was rated moderate, with "Advising on learning methods

and scientific research" ($\overline{X}$ = 3.50; SD = 1.02) and "Guiding research methods, report writing, and thesis preparation" ($\overline{X}$ = 3.64; SD = 0.89). These activities are provided mainly in later study stages and largely meet minimum academic requirements.

Activities related to soft skills and career guidance received lower scores. "Advising on study methods and time management" ($\overline{X}$ = 3.52; SD = 0.87) and "Supporting soft-skill development, teamwork, and adaptation" ($\overline{X}$ = 3.51; SD = 0.96) reflect an emerging but underdeveloped focus. Particularly, "Supporting internship placement, thesis topic selection, and career orientation" scored only ($\overline{X}$ = 3.27; SD = 0.88), highlighting a weak connection between advising and labor market demands.

Overall, advising in Mekong Delta universities remains concentrated on academic support, while areas such as skills, research, and career counseling receive limited attention. This indicates the need to broaden advising scope and enhance personalization to promote students' holistic development in the context of digital transformation and international integration.

3.3.2. Processes and tools supporting academic advising

In Mekong Delta universities, advising processes typically include: (1) assigning advisors to classes or student groups; (2) developing semester- or year-based plans; (3) coordinating with academic and student affairs offices for record management and progress monitoring; and (4) reporting outcomes to institutional leadership. The clarity and consistency of these processes differ across institutions, with some providing detailed guidelines while others rely on advisors' individual experience, leading to variation in quality.

Supporting tools comprise academic management systems, student portals, learning management systems (LMS), online study platforms, and standardized templates for monitoring, surveys, and reporting. In practice, these tools serve mainly administrative purposes, while applications for personalized advising and career guidance remain limited. Students' evaluations of advising processes and tools are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' perceptions of the extent of advising support

No	Advising content	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rank
1	Advising on study planning, course selection, and progress monitoring	3.71	0.89	1
2	Advising on effective study methods, use of resources, and time management	3.52	0.87	4
3	Guiding research methods, report writing, and thesis preparation	3.64	0.89	2
4	Advising on career orientation, job application skills, and career choice	3.55	0.94	3
5	Supporting soft-skill development, teamwork, and adaptation to university life	3.51	0.96	5

The survey results highlight both strengths and limitations in advising processes and tools. Advising shows its strongest performance in academic support, with the indicator "Advising on study planning, course selection, and progress monitoring" achieving the highest score ($\overline{X}$ = 3.71; SD = 0.89), reflecting consistency with credit-based training requirements. However, other areas were only moderately rated, such as research-related advising ($\overline{X}$ = 3.64) and career orientation ($\overline{X}$ = 3.55), while soft-skill development received the lowest score ($\overline{X}$ =

3.51). These results indicate that current processes and tools remain focused mainly on administrative and academic functions, with limited capacity to support more specialized advising needs. From a management perspective, the findings suggest a trend of continued reliance on traditional tools and basic digital applications, underscoring the necessity of advancing digital transformation by integrating LMS, academic data systems, and online platforms to establish continuous, multi-channel interactions that can enhance the overall effectiveness of student advising.

3.3.3. Interaction channels in academic advising

In the context of higher education in the Mekong Delta, interaction channels between advisors and students play a vital role in sustaining communication, supporting learning, and accompanying students in their overall development. Current interaction modes are diverse, including face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, text messaging, email, social media, online consultations, and official institutional platforms. The survey results on the use of these interaction modes are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Common interaction channels used by academic advisors with students

No	Mode of interaction	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rank
1	Face-to-face meetings with students (individual, group, or class-based)	3.11	1.04	5
2	Telephone calls regarding academic, behavioral, or personal issues	3.12	1.10	4
3	Text messaging (SMS, Zalo, WhatsApp, etc.) for reminders or support	3.31	1.07	3
4	Email communication for notifications, guidance, or academic exchange	2.68	1.09	7
5	Social media platforms (Facebook, Zalo, etc.) for information sharing and advising	4.29	0.87	1
6	Online consultations via Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, or LMS	2.94	1.21	6
7	Official institutional platforms (academic management systems, student portals, websites)	3.88	1.11	2

The findings show that social media is the most frequently used channel ($\overline{X}$ = 4.29), reflecting its accessibility, convenience, and immediacy in connecting with students. This is followed by official institutional platforms ($\overline{X}$ = 3.88), indicating a gradual shift toward more transparent and regulated digital systems. Traditional modes such as face-to-face meetings ($\overline{X}$ = 3.11) and telephone calls ($\overline{X}$ = 3.12) remain in use but are no longer dominant. By contrast, email ($\overline{X}$ = 2.68) and online consultations via Zoom/Google Meet ($\overline{X}$ = 2.94) received the lowest scores, pointing to students' limited habits of use and weaker engagement with these tools.

These results highlight a clear distinction between informal channels (e.g., social media, text messaging), which are favored by students for their familiarity and convenience, and formal channels (e.g., learning management systems, student portals), which provide transparency, data management, and institutional accountability. In the context of digital transformation, academic advising should move toward a blended advising model that combines face-to-face interaction, formal institutional platforms, and informal digital tools. Such an approach balances accessibility and flexibility with formality and accountability,

aligning with the ongoing modernization of higher education.

3.3.4. Monitoring and evaluation of academic advising

Monitoring and evaluation are critical components of academic advising, serving to ensure its quality, transparency, and effectiveness. In universities across the Mekong Delta, these activities are currently conducted primarily through periodic advisor reports, academic record reviews, student feedback, and indirect analysis of academic performance. However, the process remains largely administrative, lacks fully integrated digital tools, and has yet to make comprehensive use of multidimensional student feedback. Survey results on advisors' knowledge and skills are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Advisors' competency levels in academic advising knowledge

No	Competency area	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rank
1	Understanding curricula and course assessment	3.98	0.73	1
2	Using information technology in management and online advising	3.89	0.81	2
3	Mastery of academic regulations and graduation requirements	3.87	0.76	3
4	Understanding the roles and responsibilities of advisors	3.87	0.78	4
5	Skills in academic and career advising	3.81	0.84	5
6	Knowledge of student support policies	3.79	0.82	6
7	Knowledge of student psychology and social psychology	3.74	0.88	7

The results show that academic competencies received the highest ratings. The indicators *"Understanding curricula and course assessment"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.98; SD = 0.73) and *"Mastery of academic regulations and graduation requirements"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.87; SD = 0.76) highlight advisors' strengths in ensuring student progress and maintaining instructional quality. These findings also reflect the persistence of a traditional management orientation that prioritizes administrative and academic functions.

Technological competencies were rated at a moderately high level, with *"Using information technology in management and online advising"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.89; SD = 0.81), indicating early adaptation to the demands of digital transformation in higher education. However, differences across institutions point to uneven investment in and use of digital tools, creating challenges for standardizing technological applications in advising.

By contrast, personalized advising competencies were rated only moderate. The indicators *"Skills in academic and career advising"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.81) and *"Knowledge of student psychology and social psychology"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.74) reveal limitations in delivering holistic support and addressing students' increasingly diverse needs, especially in the context of international integration and complex social dynamics.

Competencies related to policy awareness and advisor roles (ranging from 3.79 to 3.87) further expose inconsistencies in understanding and implementation. Some faculty members continue to encounter difficulties in applying student support policies, leading to uneven effectiveness across institutions.

Standard deviations between 0.73 and 0.88 indicate relatively dispersed assessments, particularly for indicators concerning advising skills and psychological knowledge. This suggests that advisor quality remains uneven, underscoring the need for systematic capacity building, soft-skill enhancement, and the adoption of standardized competency frameworks to

advance professionalization. Such measures are critical for improving both the effectiveness and sustainability of academic advising in universities in the Mekong Delta.

Overall, while academic advising in the region has been implemented systematically and a basic framework has been established, it remains constrained in depth, personalization, and consistency in the use of support tools. Moving forward, stronger emphasis should be placed on developing advisor capacity, accelerating digital transformation, and expanding personalized advising to better address students' diverse needs.

In conclusion, despite notable progress, significant limitations persist. Therefore, analyzing the management of academic advising through the PDCA cycle is essential to identify key influencing factors and to propose targeted improvements.

3.4. Management of Academic Advising through the PDCA Cycle

Applying the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) cycle to academic advising provides a systematic framework that promotes consistency and continuous improvement. In the **Plan** stage, universities establish clear objectives, define content and procedures, and allocate resources for advising activities. During the **Do** stage, advisors carry out academic counseling, career guidance, and psychological and financial support, while collaborating with functional units to deliver comprehensive student services. The **Check** stage focuses on monitoring and evaluation through periodic reports, student feedback surveys, and assessments of goal attainment. Finally, the **Act** stage enables institutions to revise plans, refine procedures, and implement innovative solutions to enhance the quality and effectiveness of advising, thereby addressing students' increasingly diverse needs.

In universities across the Mekong Delta, the management of academic advising through the PDCA cycle is organized as follows:

3.4.1. Planning Policies and Academic Advising Programs

The planning stage forms the cornerstone of academic advising management, establishing strategic direction and providing the basis for subsequent steps in the PDCA cycle. To assess the degree of formality, feasibility, and coordination in advising plans, this study examined ten indicators capturing strategic alignment, stakeholder participation, supporting tools, and evaluation criteria, as summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Current practices in planning academic advising activities

No	Plan	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rank
1	Advising plans aligned with the university's development strategy	3.82	0.81	1
2	Plans based on student needs assessments and characteristics	3.73	0.85	4
3	Clear objectives, specific and feasible content	3.77	0.85	2
4	Involvement of faculty, students, and relevant units	3.74	0.92	3
5	Close coordination among internal units in planning	3.72	0.87	5
6	Clear assignment of responsibilities to faculty, departments, and students	3.67	0.88	6
7	Plans fully communicated to faculty, students, and stakeholders	3.63	0.92	8
8	Application of information technology in planning and monitoring implementation	3.58	0.87	10

No	Plan	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rank
9	Clear and specific performance evaluation criteria	3.59	0.9	9
10	Mechanisms for collecting feedback to enable flexible adjustments	3.64	0.86	7

Survey results indicate that the development of advising plans was rated at a moderately good level ($\overline{X}$= 3.58 - 3.82). The highest-rated indicator, *"Advising plans aligned with the university's development strategy"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.82), reflects a strong emphasis on strategic orientation. This was followed by *"Clear objectives, specific and feasible content"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.77) and *"Involvement of stakeholders"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.74), underscoring the practicality of the plans and the presence of collaborative efforts in their formulation.

By contrast, lower scores were assigned to *"Application of information technology in planning and monitoring"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.58), *"Clear performance evaluation criteria"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.59), and *"Plans fully communicated"* ($\overline{X}$= 3.63). These results reveal limitations in the integration of digital tools, the transparency of information, and the establishment of measurable benchmarks. Standard deviations ranging from 0.81 to 0.92 suggest moderate variability, with the greatest dispersion in indicators concerning communication and participation, indicating uneven implementation across institutions.

Overall, the planning stage of advising management in Mekong Delta universities shows evidence of strategic alignment and initial stakeholder engagement. Nonetheless, persistent shortcomings remain in technology utilization, evaluation design, and information dissemination. Addressing these requires the standardization of planning procedures, stronger integration of information technology, and closer alignment with learning outcomes to enhance both the effectiveness and efficiency of academic advising management.

3.4.2. Implementing Academic Advising Activities

The implementation stage operationalizes advising plans by assigning responsibilities, fostering cross-unit coordination, organizing regular meetings, and utilizing supportive tools. The survey results offer an overview of how academic advising activities are executed in universities across the Mekong Delta.

Table 8. Current practices in implementing academic advising activities in Mekong Delta universities

No	Implementation item	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rank
1	Universities establish clear procedures for organizing advising activities	3.55	0.80	6
2	Advisors are clearly assigned and fulfill duties as prescribed	3.40	1.04	10
3	Advising activities involve coordination among university units	3.57	0.93	4
4	Universities organize regular meetings between advisors and students	3.59	0.94	2
5	Advising is delivered flexibly, combining face-to-face and online formats	3.58	0.97	3
6	Information technology is applied in organizing advising activities	3.54	0.89	7
7	Universities provide policies to support faculty advisors	3.47	0.99	9
8	Students can easily contact advisors when support is needed	3.66	0.92	1

No	Implementation item	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rank
9	Universities have criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of advising implementation	3.55	0.88	5
10	Universities establish feedback mechanisms to improve advising activities	3.54	0.88	8

The mean scores ranged from 3.40 to 3.66, indicating that the organization of advising activities was assessed at a moderately good level. The highest-rated indicator, *"Students can easily contact advisors when support is needed"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.66; SD = 0.92), highlights the accessibility and responsiveness of advisors. This was followed by *"Regular meetings between advisors and students"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.59) and *"Flexible delivery combining face-to-face and online formats"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.58), underscoring the diversity of advising modalities in line with digital transformation and practical requirements.

Other items, including *"Coordination among units"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.57) and *"Clear procedures"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.55), also received relatively favorable ratings, reflecting initial progress toward standardization. In contrast, lower scores for *"Application of information technology"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.54), *"Feedback mechanisms"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.54), and *"Faculty support policies"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.47) point to shortcomings in digital adoption, systematic feedback, and incentive structures for advisors. Notably, the lowest score was for *"Advisors clearly assigned and fulfilling duties as prescribed"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.40; SD = 1.04), which also showed the highest variability, revealing significant institutional differences in the assignment and execution of advising responsibilities.

Overall, the implementation of academic advising in Mekong Delta universities ensures student accessibility, diversifies advising formats, and promotes cross-unit collaboration. However, persistent gaps in role assignment, IT application, feedback mechanisms, and faculty support policies indicate a lack of consistency. Moving forward, it is crucial to standardize role assignment procedures, enhance digital integration, establish transparent feedback systems, and develop supportive policies for faculty advisors to strengthen both the quality and effectiveness of advising implementation.

3.4.3. Monitoring and Evaluation of Academic Advising

Monitoring and evaluation play a central role in the PDCA cycle by tracking the implementation of advising plans, identifying limitations, and providing a basis for adjustments and continuous improvement. Survey findings on monitoring and evaluation practices in Mekong Delta universities are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Current practices in monitoring and evaluating academic advising

No	Monitoring and evaluation item	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rank
1	Universities have procedures for evaluating advising from institutional to faculty levels	3.60	0.89	4
2	Monitoring and evaluation of advising are conducted periodically according to institutional plans	3.63	1.04	2
3	Evaluation methods ensure scientific rigor, objectivity, and practical relevance	3.61	0.98	3
4	Monitoring and evaluation involve participation from relevant stakeholders	3.56	0.95	7

No	Monitoring and evaluation item	$\overline{X}$	SD	Rank
5	Information technology is applied in monitoring and evaluation of advising activities	3.57	0.84	6
6	A data collection system (surveys, software, etc.) supports monitoring and evaluation	3.37	0.84	10
7	Students provide feedback on advising quality through surveys and periodic evaluations	3.71	0.81	1
8	Advisors contribute feedback during the monitoring and evaluation process	3.59	1.02	5
9	Universities use evaluation results to adjust and improve advising activities	3.53	0.95	8
10	Monitoring and evaluation are improved annually to enhance quality	3.50	0.98	9

The mean scores ranged from 3.37 to 3.71, indicating that monitoring and evaluation of advising activities are currently at a moderately good level. The highest-rated indicator, *"Students provide feedback on advising quality through surveys and periodic evaluations"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.71; SD = 0.81), signals a positive trend toward greater student involvement in quality assurance. This was followed by *"Periodic monitoring and evaluation according to institutional plans"* ($\overline{X}$= 3.63) and *"Evaluation methods ensuring scientific rigor and objectivity"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.61), suggesting that universities have established a basic but functional framework for these practices.

By contrast, several indicators received lower ratings, revealing critical gaps. *"A data collection system supporting monitoring and evaluation"* obtained the lowest mean ($\overline{X}$ = 3.37), underscoring limited use of digital tools and learning data. Likewise, *"Annual improvements in monitoring and evaluation"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.50) and *"Use of evaluation results for adjustments"* ($\overline{X}$ = 3.53) point to weak continuity and underdeveloped feedback–improvement mechanisms. Standard deviations ranged from 0.81 to 1.04, with the highest variability in *"Periodic monitoring and evaluation"* (SD = 1.04), reflecting significant disparities among universities in sustaining regular review processes.

Overall, monitoring and evaluation of academic advising in Mekong Delta universities demonstrate an emerging foundation of procedures, planning, and stakeholder engagement, along with encouraging levels of student feedback. Nonetheless, shortcomings persist in technology adoption, data system development, and mechanisms for continuous improvement. Strengthening effectiveness will require the integration of modern M&E systems, the application of learning analytics, and a systematic linkage of evaluation results to policy and procedural adjustments, thereby ensuring transparency and ongoing quality enhancement.

3.4.4. Improvement and Development of Academic Advising

Within the PDCA cycle, the **Act** stage plays a pivotal role in transforming monitoring results into actionable improvements, thereby ensuring the continuous enhancement of academic advising. Analysis reveals several persisting limitations: planning remains weak in terms of technological integration and clear evaluation criteria; implementation is inconsistent in role assignment and faculty support; and monitoring lacks sufficient data and mechanisms for annual improvement.

To address these shortcomings, three directions for improvement are recommended: (1) Standardizing planning processes by aligning them with institutional development strategies and learning outcomes, while integrating digital tools; (2) Synchronizing implementation

through transparent role assignments, supportive mechanisms for faculty, and flexible advising modalities; (3) Innovating monitoring and evaluation by deploying modern M&E systems, leveraging learning analytics, and incorporating student feedback.

In the long term, the development of a competency framework for academic advisors - adapted from international standards and contextualized to the Mekong Delta - together with the establishment of Academic Advising Clubs, will provide a professional community for support and knowledge sharing. This approach will not only overcome existing limitations but also institutionalize a mechanism of continuous improvement, advancing academic advising management toward greater professionalism, data-driven practices, and sustainability, while providing a robust foundation for conclusions and policy implications.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the management of academic advising in universities across the Mekong Delta through the PDCA cycle. The findings indicate that, while an advising system has gradually taken shape, several limitations persist. These include the planning lacks explicit criteria and digital integration; implementation remains inconsistent and insufficiently supported by institutional mechanisms; and monitoring and evaluation are constrained by limited data and weak connections to continuous improvement.

To address these shortcomings, three strategic directions are proposed: (1) Standardizing processes by aligning advising with institutional strategies and learning outcomes, while embedding digital tools; (2) Enhancing implementation through clear role assignments, stronger faculty support, and more flexible advising approaches; (3) Modernizing monitoring and evaluation by adopting advanced M&E systems informed by learning analytics and student feedback.

In addition, developing a competency framework for advisors that draws on international standards while adapting to regional contexts—together with the establishment of academic advising clubs—constitutes a long-term strategy to strengthen quality, sustainability, and professionalism.

Taken together, these findings provide a solid foundation for advancing the management of academic advising in Mekong Delta universities and offer meaningful policy implications in the context of digital transformation and higher education integration.

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