

STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON ACADEMIC ADVISING AT THE FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, AN GIANG UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Academic advisors play an important role in connecting students with the university, guiding and supporting them to complete their studies effectively and on schedule. This study examined the academic advising practices at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, An Giang University from students' perspectives. It turned out that academic advisors played a significant role in the completion of students' learning process despite several challenges. They supported students not only in their learning but also in their life both during academic years and some years after graduation. However, a few students showed their dissatisfaction on this activity. To enhance the role of advisors, the academic advisors, the university and the students should coordinate and synchronize in acting. That is the academic advisors should better know their students, the university should control this activity more academically and the students should equip themselves with knowledge of the matter.

Keywords: *Academic advisor, academic advising activity, connect, credit-based training, students, support.*

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of higher education, when students are struggling with choices and challenges, the role of academic advisors has never been more significant. As experts in education, they can help students overcome troubles in learning and give appropriate support to achieve their learning aim. Besides, they also act as the guide who leads students to pass the complexity of the university learning environment. The effectiveness of academic advisors' work belongs to their understanding of the students' situation, the knowledge of the university policies and how the university works as well as the trend of the society. Despite their crucial role, the reality of academic advisors' role fails to remain poorly understood. The academic advising team has not been adequately trained in advising skills and mainly relies on practical experience, learning from practice, and participation in a limited number of academic advising seminars (Nguyen & Dang, 2019).

The role of academic advisors in universities is important in meeting the requirements of credit-based training for full-time students and in effectively supporting students' learning and improving educational quality (Pham, 2018).

Nguyen (2022) reported that although academic advising activities at the University of Education, The University of Danang were considered effective, further improvements required regular training programs to enhance advisors' counseling knowledge and skills, as well as periodic surveys to collect students' feedback on their advising needs.

It is the fact that the academic advising activities at An Giang University in general and the Faculty of Foreign Languages in particular in recent years have contributed significantly to supporting students

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in many aspects despite still having many limitations. Moreover, up to now, there has not been any official research on academic advising work at An Giang University as well as at the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Therefore, conducting research on this issue would provide a more comprehensive and clear view of the reality of the academic advising work at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, from which appropriate recommendations would be made. The results of this study would be the scientific base for detailed instructions on academic advising activities at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, An Giang University. The results of the study were expected to contribute to improving the quality of teaching and learning at the Faculty of Foreign Languages in particular and at An Giang University in general and to be a premise for more in-depth and multi-dimensional surveys on this issue.

2. Literature Review and Synthesis

2.1. The Definition of Academic Advising

Currently, in Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training has not issued a specific general regulation on academic advising work applicable to all universities. However, a number of circulars and regulations of the Ministry have mentioned the role and tasks of academic advisors in the context of student affairs and university training. Specifically:

Circular No. 10/2016/TT-BGDĐT dated April 5, 2016: Promulgating the Regulations on student affairs for full-time university training programs, which mentions support and consultation for students during their studies.

Circular No. 08/2021/TT-BGDĐT dated March 18, 2021: Promulgating regulations on university training, regulations on supporting students in the learning and training process.

Based on these circulars and regulations, many universities have developed and issued their own regulations on academic advising work suitable to the characteristics and needs of each school.

According to the Regulations on Academic Advisory Work at An Giang University (Decision 362/QĐ-DHAG), "academic advisor is a person appointed by the Rector to undertake the work of advising and supporting students to maximize their learning, scientific research and career orientation abilities; to carry out student management work in the majored classes. An academic advisor is appointed according to specialized class units (classes according to training majors). Each specialized class has one academic advisor. In case a specialized class has 121 students or more, it is divided into 2 specialized classes."

2.2. The Role of the Academic Advisor

Academic advising is an activity that plays an important and indispensable role in the successful training of university students. In their research, Tran and Kieu (2012) claimed that each academic advisor was a "link" in the circle of relationships between students, training programs, and schools. Therefore, most universities and some colleges now have regulations clearly stating the tasks, roles, rights, and responsibilities of academic advisors.

According to Bui and Luong (2023), in credit-based training, lecturers working as academic advisors are representatives of the institution in managing students' learning and training activities and have a significant influence on students' academic outcomes and career choices.

Sharing the same view, Nguyen (2022) agreed that, to create an effective connection between students and the institution, academic advisors hold a central position in this relationship. They also accompany and support students throughout their learning process at university. Through academic advisors, students can quickly and clearly access information about regulations, training programs, objectives, training content, and the functions and responsibilities of the institution. At the same time, academic advisors advise and guide students so that each student can develop a study plan suited to their abilities and circumstances in order to achieve the best academic results.

Academic advising has also received considerable attention from higher education institutions worldwide. According to Kuh (1997), the task of academic advising is particularly important, especially in guiding students to select courses that align with their educational and career goals. Therefore, academic advising also plays a strategic role in the educational environment. For many students,

the academic advisor is one of the few individuals who understands what is needed to guide them through their studies and help them graduate on time. Few others know students as well as their academic advisors. As a result, academic advisors are well positioned to assist students not only in deciding which courses to take but also in navigating their university studies.

Hart-Baldrige (2020) argued that, to ensure the effective role of academic advisors, departments and universities should provide adequate support for faculty involved in student advising. The study also emphasized the need for institutions to review existing advising practices and recommended fostering discussions on academic advising, clarifying advisory roles, setting clear expectations, reallocating workloads, and strengthening institutional support for academic advisors.

Research by Dollinger, Vanderlelie, and Sealey (2021) showed the importance of maintaining relationships between academic advisors and students to help students feel supported throughout their university experience. However, this relationship was lost or undervalued due to the increasing number of students per class and the trend of classes moving online.

3. Methodology

The study used mixed research methods including qualitative research methods and quantitative research methods, using semi-structured interviews (with 20 students) and survey questionnaires (with 315 students) to collect data from students majoring in English at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, An Giang University. This method of research brought a deeper and more thorough insight into the matter as well as eliminated the weakness of each method. While quantitative research helps collect a large number of data, the other helps the research clarify and explore the hidden reasons behind the answers, which enhances the reliability of the study.

Qualitative data were coded and analyzed using thematic analysis to determine the reality of the academic advising work of the faculty, students' perceptions and attitudes towards their academic advisor. Data collected through questionnaires was analyzed with SPSS 25 and Excel 360 software to determine the views and attitudes of learners towards the academic advisor's activity at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, generalizing the recommendations and suggestions of advisors and mentees to help improve academic advising activities.

3.1. Research Subjects

The research surveyed English major students enrolled in two programs: English Language Teacher Education and English Linguistics and Literature at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, An Giang University.

3.2. Research Purpose

The study was carried out to:

1. Identify the current status of academic advising at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, An Giang University from the students' perspective.
2. Propose solutions to improve academic advising at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, An Giang University from students' perspectives.

3.3. Quantitative Research Tools: Student Survey Questionnaire

The study used one questionnaire which was designed accordance with the theory related to academic advising work to collect information from students. The system of survey questions was built appropriately according to each content. The questionnaire was divided into two main parts:

Part 1: Student's personal information including major, year of study, student's opinion on the role of academic advisor and the level of support received from academic advisors.

Part 2: The reality of academic advising work includes 18 closed questions and 04 open questions asking students to state their opinions and give some suggestions for better academic advising.

The study used the sample size calculation formula calculated according to the sample size formula of Slovin (1960) because this formula ensures the representativeness of the research group. With a total of 1,167 full-time students studying at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, the minimum sample size is

290 students. The topic planned to conduct a survey of 299 students majoring in English Language Teacher Education and English Linguistics and Literature at the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Sampling was to be carried out by the stratification method and estimated to select 23 students from each class in both majors. To ensure the representativeness of the sample size, participants were selected by class, program, and year of study, with participation being voluntary and subject to the lecturer's permission. However, because each study group had a different number of students, which was not as expected, the actual number of survey questionnaires collected was 315, 16 higher than expected. And this was acceptable as the size was within permission. Of these, 115 students majoring in English Language Teacher Education and 200 students majoring in English Linguistics and Literature participated, including 129 fourth-year students (41%), 69 third-year students (21.9%), 48 second-year students (15.2%) and 69 first-year students (21.9%), well presenting the sample as the number of students studying English language was higher than that of English Language Teacher Education.

3.4. Qualitative Research Tools: Semi-Structured Interviews with Students

From the survey results, the research team selected 20 students representing the classes who had specific and clear answers and contacted them for interviews. Semi-structured interviews with students were conducted to understand students' evaluation of their academic advisor, the actual activities of academic advising in the classes and the suggestions and expectations of students for their academic advisor so that this activity could be implemented better.

4. Research Results

4.1. Questionnaire Results

4.1.1. Field of study

The survey participants included two majors: English Language Teacher Education (no. 1) and English Linguistics and Literature (no. 2). The analysis results showed that Sig. = 0.001 (< 0.05), which means that the variance of the two major groups is different and Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.009 (< 0.05), which means that there is a statistically significant difference in the opinions of the two groups of students on the academic advisor.

Table 1: Code of the majors

Major	Code
English Pedagogy	1
English Language	2

Table 2: Statistical results on the satisfaction of students on academic advisors by fields of study

Group Statistics					
	Major	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Satisfaction	1	115	4.2454	.58067	.05415
	2	200	4.0428	.78262	.05534

The analysis results showed that the mean value of English Language Teacher Education was higher than that of English Linguistics and Literature. Therefore, it could be concluded that English Language Teacher Education students evaluated academic advising more positively than English Linguistics and Literature students.

4.1.2. School year

The analysis results showed that all students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages were satisfied with their academic advisors. However, students in different years of study had different levels of satisfaction with their academic advisors. While first-year students were completely satisfied with the academic advising work (mean = 4.3454), the satisfaction level gradually decreased over the years and reached the lowest level when students studied in the third year at the school (mean = 4.0850 and mean = 3.6586). However, when they almost finished their studies and were preparing to graduate, their satisfaction level rose again (mean = 4.1873).

Table 3: Code of school years

Major	Code
1 st year	1
2 nd year	2
3 rd year	3
4 th year	4

Table 4: Statistical results on the reality of academic advising work by school year

Group Statistics					
	School years	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total mean score	1	69	4.3454	.52132	.06276
	2	48	4.2569	.59224	.08548
	3	69	3.6586	.85783	.10327
	4	129	4.1873	.67686	.05959
	Total	315	4.1168	.72121	.04064

4.1.3. The role of academic advisors for students

Almost 90% of students participating in the study said that academic advisors played a very important role (53.7%) and an important role (32.1%) for them. Only 14.2% of students did not appreciate the role of this work, respectively normal (8.2%), quite important (5.7%) and unimportant (0.3%).

4.1.4. The frequency of receiving support from academic advisors

More than 50% of respondents regularly received support from their academic advisors, more than 30% of the research group received support occasionally and 11.7% of students said they rarely or never received support from academic advisors with values of 11.1% and 0.6% respectively.

4.1.5. The reality of academic advising work

The research team conducted descriptive statistical analysis to measure students' perceptions of the reality of academic advising work. The research results showed that students highly appreciated the activities that the academic advisor performed for them ($M = 4.116$, $SD = 0.72121$). Although there were differences between the specific tasks that academic advisors performed for students, in general, the level of students' evaluation of the teachers' advisory activities was high. Specifically, the bi-weekly class meeting was the factor that students considered the academic advisor to perform most often ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.843$), followed by answering questions about the curriculum and school regulations and coordinating with the school, faculties and departments to support students ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.829$). The third-highest point rated among the academic advising tasks is the timely communication between teachers and individual students when they need advice or support ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.925$). In contrast, advising students on personal and psychological issues other than academics, career and employment advice for students and coordinating and contacting parents to support students received the lowest ratings from students with mean values all below 4, respectively $M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.067$; $M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.998$ and $M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.222$.

The remaining specific tasks that academic advisors had performed for students in the past include: advising students on related policies; resolving issues related to course registration which received high appreciation from students. Next was guiding students on how to find information, contact work related to studying and training from relevant units in the school; regularly grasp the class situation to promptly resolve arising issues; chairing class meetings on considering rewards and disciplining students; guiding, encouraging, and creating conditions for students to participate in academic activities, scientific research; extracurricular activities; monitoring students' learning and training results; periodically working with the Class Executive Committee twice a month; guiding students to implement relevant legal documents and regulations and consulting, guiding students to register and adjust their study plans to suit their abilities

and circumstances and guiding students to register for courses all received high ratings from students with average values ranging from $M = 4.21$ to $M = 4.01$ and $SD = 0.802$ to $SD = 1.020$.

4.1.6. Additional academic advising practices

In addition to the above tasks, students acknowledged that their academic advisor had done a lot of other different things for the class. Namely, when they had problems such as facing financial difficulties, going for internships, needing to find a job, career counseling, academic warnings, tuition payment deadlines and course registration times, monitoring academic results and providing timely reminders, support, psychological counseling or encouragement when they encountered difficulties in life, reminding and encouraging them to participate in extracurricular activities to accumulate enough practice points, regularly updating information about conferences and seminars for the class to participate in. In addition to these tasks, some academic advisors also occasionally shared experiences, supported bonding between members, reminded students about the conditions for graduation, gave the class money and their personal belongings or even organized birthdays for them on some class activities days.

The above feedback showed that the majority of students (158/315) of the Faculty of Foreign Languages acknowledged that they received a lot of support from the academic advisors in addition to the basic things that a academic advisor usually did.

4.1.7. Areas in which students expect greater support from academic advisors

Although they had received a lot of support from academic advisors, many students (135/315) still wanted their academic advisors to help with many other things such as updating information from the school like announcements about tuition fees, exam schedules, scholarships, course registration, providing specialized support such as small group meetings to support when needed, sharing personal experiences, organizing extracurricular activities to connect students, helping in choosing majors and career orientation, psychological counseling (especially for first-year students because they were not familiar with the university learning environment yet).

In addition, a few students wished to be supported in connecting them with alumni of previous courses to learn experience of studying or applying for jobs; connecting them with the school to get satisfactory answers to questions and supporting students in meeting graduation certificates as what to study, what certificates to get, which language center to register and when to start, and discussing with the school about student-related issues such as tuition fee increases.

4.1.8. Students' expectations of academic advising

A small number of the students surveyed (76/315) said that the academic advisors had not met their expectations in the class. To be more precise, the academic advisors sometimes forgot or slowly replied to their messages, making it difficult for them to handle work. Besides, some did not fully grasp the situation of the class, so they could not have appropriate support. Next, the academic advisors did not update the class with complete information and did not answer all the questions of the students. Finally, it was difficult for students to meet their academic advisors. For example, whenever they needed to contact their academic advisor, they found it hard because he was not at school and even did not pick up the phone.

However, the remaining majority of students had no opinion or had very positive evaluation of their academic advisors.

4.1.9. Proposing some solutions to improve the effectiveness of academic advising work at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, An Giang University from the learner's side

128 of 315 students made suggestions for improving the student support work. There were a variety of expectations that students had for their academic advisor. According to priority, they hoped that their academic advisor should (1) be more aware of their situation to provide timely support, (2) regularly hold class meetings so that students could meet and ask for advice on their problem, (3) be more friendly and open with students, which would make them feel comfortable and exchange information and organize regular classroom activities to grasp the class situation, (4) support them in

choosing subjects and connecting students together, (5) respond to their messages more promptly and frequently, (6) share their experiences.

In addition, students also suggested that the university should regularly organize training courses for academic advisors on both academic advising knowledge and skills so that they could do their advisory work better.

By contrast, more than 50% of the surveyed students were very satisfied with their class's academic advisor and had no suggestions for improvement.

4.2. Interview Results

In order to better understand the situation of academic advising of the Faculty of Foreign Languages as well as to know some of the students' hidden desires for their academic advisors, a questionnaire was designed. This questionnaire was developed based on the literature review of the role of an academic advisor.

After analyzing the survey results, the research team selected 20 representative ballots from the studied groups to ask for interviews. Interviews were conducted either directly or by phone. All interviews were recorded and carefully noted. Interview results were committed to confidentiality and used only for research purposes.

4.2.1. Communication between students and lecturers

The interview results showed that most students contacted their academic advisors. Of the twenty students interviewed, six did not or had never contacted their academic advisors. These students believed that they could get information through the class committee or class meetings, so contacting him was unnecessary. Five occasionally contacted their academic advisors when needed. The remaining, eleven students, regularly used channels such as class activities, messaging on class groups, or meeting with their academic advisors privately.

4.2.2. Student Evaluations of Academic Advisor Activities

a) Class activities

Class activities were highly appreciated by students. Eighteen students admitted that class activities were necessary because this was an opportunity for academic advisors and the class to meet, inform about necessary issues as well as answer questions. However, two out of twenty participating in the interview said that class activities were unnecessary. These students said that everything could be done through class groups such as Zalo and Messenger, so meetings for class activities were unnecessary and not many students participated in this activity, which wasted the time of the academic advisor as well as other students.

b) Frequency of class activities

When asked for their opinions on the regularity of the class activities, twelve students felt that the current class schedule was very suitable because it helped students keep up with information from the school and faculty. In contrast, one hoped to have more class activities because he wanted to meet the academic advisors more often to get advice on many issues. However, seven thought that it was not necessary to organize so many class activities because it would be a waste of time. They were mature enough to get information through many different channels, but not from the academic advisor in person.

c) Academic advisors' participation in class activities

Most of the academic advisors chaired class meetings and organized activities according to the school's assignment and regulations. However, two out of twenty students said that their academic advisor never and rarely participated in class meetings because he was too busy or had sent announcements in the class group, so they did not organize class activities according to the schedule.

d) Support from academic advisors

Most of the interviewees confirmed that they received a lot of support from their academic advisors including announcements from the school and faculty and ways to register for courses or advice on difficulties in life and sharing experiences and even job referrals. Only one student said that he did not receive support from the academic advisor and stated that the information from the academic advisor was not accurate, so he often asked from the class committee or other students but not from his academic advisor.

4.2.3. Students' evaluations of academic advisors' attitudes

Most students highly appreciated their academic advisors for their enthusiasm, care and sense of responsibility towards the class, but one student did not give an opinion on this issue. However, students also suggested that to do this activity better, academic advisors should (1) learn and better understand the school's rules and regulations to promptly support and inform students; (2) better understand the training program to be able to accurately answer the questions students enquire; (3) pay more attention to the class to grasp the current problems of the class; (4) reply students' messages faster or (5) create a secret link so that students could send sensitive issues that needed to be understood by the academic advisor.

4.2.4. Student feedback and recommendations for academic advisors

Apart from five students who felt that the work of the academic advisor for the class was normal and one student who was not satisfied with his academic advisor, the remaining 14 students were very satisfied with what the academic advisor did for the class. However, to make the academic advising activity better, most students wanted their academic advisor to respond quickly and accurately to their questions, grasp the class situation in a timely manner and be enthusiastic and proactive in contacting students.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

5.1. Conclusion

The research results showed that students highly appreciated the role of academic advisor in the educational environment of An Giang University. Specifically, the survey results showed that all academic advisor's criteria were highly appreciated by students. Besides, English Language Teacher Education students were more satisfied with their academic advisor than English Language students. Next, students in different years had different levels of satisfaction with their academic advisor. Furthermore, the majority of students believed that their academic advisor had fulfilled their tasks well and very well supported and advised them in learning activities such as choosing subjects, registering for courses, chairing meetings, and answering questions during the learning process to help them overcome difficulties and continue their studies. This research result was quite similar to those of other studies at different universities (Bui & Luong, 2023; Hayes, 2020; Khalil & Williamson, 2014). On the other hand, although the academic advisor had done their job well, students still wanted their academic advisor to be able to support them in some aspects beside the work that an academic advisor was doing, namely learning and understanding the situation of the students better to be able to support them in a timely manner.

According to the results of qualitative research (interviews) and quantitative research (questionnaires), some academic advisors had not regularly contacted the class or grasped the class situation, so they had not been able to provide timely support for students in difficult situations. Therefore, academic advisors were supposed to regularly participate and organize class meetings to help students grasp new announcements and regulations. In addition, academic advisors should guide and organize extracurricular activities beside the class meetings to help equip students with some soft skills such as time management skills, teamwork skills, and the like to help students, especially first-year ones, know how to study in a university environment and achieve better academic results. Academic advisors could also give advice and introduce part-time jobs or jobs for students after their graduation. They were also awaited to be able to give school psychological counseling and support them when they encounter questions and difficulties in life. Some students also believed that when they had questions or concerns out of studying and did not know who to ask, academic advisors should be the supporter, the scholar with whom they could discuss or consult about all issues. This finding was supported by that of Hart-Baldrige (2020).

Beside the many good points that students evaluated about academic advisor, there were also some cases where students reflected that they were not satisfied with their academic advisor in performing the assigned tasks. In other words, according to some students, their academic advisors were not really close, trustworthy or connected with the class.

5.2. Suggestions

From the above survey results, to improve the effectiveness of academic advising activities at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, An Giang University, the following measures need to be considered:

5.2.1. To academic advisors

Academic advisors need to (1) spend more time for the class and work regularly with the class committee to timely grasp the class situation and have appropriate support, (2) participate regularly in class meetings to disseminate issues and update the class situation, (3) be close and friendly with students so that they feel confident to discuss their issues with. Besides, academic advisors should (2) organize private meetings where students can confidently discuss their secret personal issues, (3) respond quickly to students' questions to help them feel secure in studying, (4) proactively assign and organize extracurricular activities to help students be interested in studying as well as equip soft skills, (5) understand documents and information from the school clearly, accurately and promptly to be able to respond to students precisely and fast and know how to listen and pay more attention to the class. This suggestion aligns with Bui and Luong's (2023) view that academic advisors should have a better understanding of their students.

5.2.2. To the university

An Giang University should (1) organize training sessions for academic advisors to help them improve their classroom management skills, and (2) get students' feedback on academic advising activity as regularly as teaching one so that academic advisors can know the problems that need to be overcome and promoted. These further confirm the suggestions in the research on the reality of academic advising work by authors at different universities across the country (Nguyen, 2022; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021).

5.2.3. To students

Each student should (1) be proactive in their studies and training, (2) actively study the instructions and grasp information such as announcements and regulations from the university and faculty, (3) regularly attend class meetings to update circulars and situations to avoid violating regulations or delaying assigned tasks, and (4) actively contact their academic advisor and class executive committee for timely support when necessary. This result strengthens the findings of Le and Le (2017) regarding the role of students in academic advising activities.

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