

Quality and Competency Requirements for the Personnel Carrying out Student Affairs Work at Vietnamese Universities in the Context of Digital Transformation

Truong Ngoc Binh

Hong Duc University
Email: truongngocbinh@hdu.edu.vn

Keywords— digital transformation, student affairs, student affairs personnel, job position, digital competency, university.

Received: 03 Jul 2026;

Received in revised form: 31 Jul 2026;

Accepted: 04 Aug 2026,

Published on: 09 Aug 2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by TheShillonga.

This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)



Abstract— Digital transformation is comprehensively reshaping university governance, and student affairs (SA) work is among the areas most directly and profoundly affected. Drawing on an analysis and synthesis of policy documents and related research, this article clarifies the characteristics and job positions of the personnel who jointly carry out SA work in the context of digital transformation across three distinctive positions that differ in legal status and employment relationship (school-level management/leadership positions; specialist positions at the SA office/centre; and SA positions within faculties/institutes), and on this basis proposes an initial system of five groups of quality and competency requirements, differentiated in priority according to the specific demands of each job position. This is the outcome of a theoretical study and should be regarded as an initial scientific hypothesis that requires further empirical validation; it aims to provide a reference basis for workforce planning, recruitment, training, professional development, and evaluation of SA personnel at Vietnamese universities during the current period of digital transformation.

I. INTRODUCTION

On December 22, 2024, the Politburo issued Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW on breakthroughs in science, technology, innovation, and national digital transformation (Central Executive Committee, 2024), which the Government subsequently operationalised through Resolution No. 71/NQ-CP dated April 1, 2025 (Government of Vietnam, 2025). In higher education, the legal framework has been institutionalised in a relatively coherent manner through the 2025 Law on Higher Education (Law No. 125/2025/QH15, replacing the 2012 Law on Higher Education and its amending laws), the National Digital Transformation Programme to 2025, with Orientation toward 2030 (Prime Minister, 2020), the Scheme on Strengthening the Application of Information Technology and Digital Transformation in Education and Training for 2022–2025, with Orientation toward 2030 (Prime Minister, 2022), and Circular No. 02/2025/TT-

BGDĐT stipulating the Digital Competency Framework for Learners (Ministry of Education and Training, 2025a).

Within this context, student affairs (SA) work — comprising five content areas under Circular No. 40/2026/TT-BGDĐT (Ministry of Education and Training, 2026a): student education, student counselling and support, student management, assessment of training-outcome scores, and disciplinary handling — is rapidly shifting into the digital environment. A recent empirical study by Bui Phuong Thuy and Nguyen Vu Bich Hien (2026), surveying 750 students, academic advisors, and management staff, found that the management factor had the strongest association with the effectiveness of supporting students' self-directed learning in the context of digital transformation — stronger even than the digital-technology factor — an important finding suggesting that the effectiveness of SA digital transformation depends first and

foremost on people and on how the organisational apparatus is structured, not solely on technological tools.

Student affairs work at Vietnamese universities is not carried out by a single, homogeneous group of personnel; rather, it involves multiple groups of personnel who differ in legal status, job position, and employment relationship — ranging from leaders and managers to full-time specialised officials and concurrently assigned lecturers.

At present, several recent competency-framework studies have been proposed, such as the competency-based framework for academic advisors developed by Pham Thi Ngoc Lan (2022), or the four-pillar framework for effective personal tutoring by Lochtie et al. (2018). However, these frameworks were built for a relatively homogeneous group of subjects (concurrently assigned lecturers acting as academic advisors) and do not account for the differentiation among the multiple job positions that jointly carry out SA work, particularly in the context of digital transformation, which generates new tasks and competencies that differ across positions. This is the gap that the present article aims to help narrow.

In order to correctly determine what qualities and competencies the personnel carrying out SA work need in the context of digital transformation, it is first necessary to answer the question: in what job positions do these personnel work, and what are their characteristics, functions, and tasks? This is a foundational step of analysis, because competency requirements are scientifically and practically meaningful only when established in relation to a specific job position, rather than as a generic competency framework applied uniformly to the entire workforce. On this basis, the article focuses on addressing two causally related research tasks: (1) analysing the characteristics and job positions of the personnel carrying out SA work in the context of digital transformation; and (2) on the basis of that analysis, identifying a system of quality and competency-requirement groups needed to meet the demands of each job position.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article belongs to the category of theoretical research and policy analysis rather than quantitative survey research. The research methods used in combination include:

- Document and legal-text research method: collecting and systematising current legal normative documents on higher-education digital transformation and student affairs (laws, resolutions, decisions, and circulars issued

during 2020–2026), providing the basis for establishing the policy context of the study.

- Analysis-synthesis method: analysing the content of domestic and international research works related to student affairs, academic advising, and digital competency (2002–2026), and synthesising the findings into arguments serving the article's objectives.
- Classification and systematisation method: classifying the personnel carrying out SA work according to their actual job positions within the organisational structure of Vietnamese universities (based on job-position schemes and organisational regulations of several universities, and Circular No. 20/2023/TT-BGDĐT on job positions in public higher-education institutions), providing the basis for analysing the characteristics of each position in Section 3.2.
- Comparison method: comparing the Digital Competency Framework for Learners (Ministry of Education and Training, 2025a), the competency-based framework for academic advisors (Pham Thi Ngoc Lan, 2022), and the four-pillar competency framework for effective personal tutoring (Lochtie et al., 2018) against the characteristics of each identified job position, providing the basis for constructing the framework of quality and competency requirements in Section 3.3.

Because this is a theoretical study that has not yet conducted a large-scale quantitative survey, the results proposed in Section 3.3 should be regarded as an initial scientific hypothesis that requires further validation with empirical data in subsequent studies (directions outlined in Section 5).

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. The Policy Context of Digital Transformation in Vietnamese Higher Education

At the national level, Decision No. 749/QĐ-TTg (Prime Minister, 2020) designated education and training as one of eight priority sectors for digital transformation; Decision No. 942/QĐ-TTg (Prime Minister, 2021) laid the groundwork for connecting the personal identification data of learners and staff with the National Population Database. At the sectoral level, Decision No. 131/QĐ-TTg (Prime Minister, 2022) identified six groups of key tasks, including developing digital competency for teaching staff and education managers; Circular No. 09/2021/TT-BGDĐT regulates the management and organisation of online teaching (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021). Circular No. 02/2025/TT-BGDĐT (Ministry of Education and Training, 2025a), effective from March 11, 2025, stipulates a Digital Competency Framework for Learners

comprising six competency domains and 24 component competencies. Regarding data infrastructure, the HEMIS system, built and operated by the Ministry of Education and Training, has digitised the data of most higher-education institutions and learners nationwide and is progressively being connected to the National Population Database. The draft Higher Education Institution Standards (Ministry of Education and Training, 2026b) — which is still under public consultation and not yet a legally effective document — further proposes incorporating data-infrastructure criteria into the minimum standards, emphasising a shift from administration based on administrative reporting toward data-driven governance.

The policy changes described above do not affect all groups of SA personnel equally: the requirement for data-driven governance directly affects the management and leadership group (accountability); the requirement to connect to and operate HEMIS directly affects the specialist-officer group (daily system operation); and the requirement of the Digital Competency Framework for Learners indirectly imposes a corresponding, and higher-level, requirement on the personnel who directly guide and accompany students within faculties/institutes. The specific relationship between each policy group and each job position is analysed in detail in Section 3.2 below.

3.2. Characteristics and Job Positions of the Personnel Carrying Out Student Affairs Work in the Context of Digital Transformation

Under the organisational structure common to Vietnamese universities, SA work is not carried out by a single focal unit; rather, it involves three groups of personnel who differ in job position, legal status, and employment relationship, and who differ in function, task, and degree of direct interaction with students: the school-level management/leadership group; the specialist-officer group at the SA office/centre; and the group carrying out SA work within faculties/institutes (academic advisors, faculty assistants). The characteristics and the changes in tasks of each position in the context of digital transformation are analysed in detail below.

3.2.1. The School-Level Management and Leadership Position

This position comprises the member(s) of the Board of Rectors/Board of Management in charge of SA work, and the Head and Deputy Heads of the school-level SA office/department, who are responsible for strategic planning, issuing policies and internal regulations on SA work, and for accountability to state management agencies and society for the SA outcomes of the entire institution. In the context of digital transformation, this position takes on additional tasks: developing strategies and plans for digital

transformation of the SA field; issuing internal regulations on the management and security of student data in accordance with Circular No. 40/2026/TT-BGDĐT; directing the connection of the institution's SA data with the HEMIS system; and being accountable for SA quality in line with the data-driven governance requirements of the draft Higher Education Institution Standards (Ministry of Education and Training, 2026b). The findings of Bui Phuong Thuy and Nguyen Vu Bich Hien (2026) — which show that the “organisation-management” factor had the strongest association with SA effectiveness in the regression model surveyed — suggest that the quality of task performance at this position may be closely related to the performance effectiveness of the other positions, although the specific causal relationship requires further verification through more specialised empirical research.

3.2.2. The Full-Time Specialist Position at the Student Affairs Office/Centre

This is the group of full-time specialist officers, assigned by professional area: management of student records and profiles; political and ideological work and dissemination of regulations; policy entitlements and scholarships; support for movements, the Youth Union/Student Association, and psychological counselling; security and discipline; school health; and support for student life. The size of this group tends to be proportional to the training scale of each institution, although there are as yet no official, comprehensive nationwide statistics to determine the specific ratio. In the context of digital transformation, this is the position most directly and comprehensively affected, because most operational processes (entering and updating data on HEMIS and student-management software; processing scholarships and policy entitlements through digital systems; compiling evidence and calculating training-outcome scores; operating online counselling channels; and monitoring and responding to misinformation on social media) are directly operated on a daily basis by this position, which also serves as the focal point for compiling and analysing data to advise the management/leadership position.

3.2.3. The Student Affairs Position within Faculties/Institutes

This position comprises faculty assistants in charge of SA work, academic advisors, and homeroom teachers — most of whom are concurrently assigned lecturers — who have the most direct and frequent contact with students. The concurrent nature of this role (combining teaching and scientific research with academic advising) creates time and resource pressures that differ from those of the two positions above, which are full-time officials/specialists. In the context of digital transformation, this position

undertakes: academic advising and personalised learning-pathway guidance through online training-management systems; organising class meetings, assessing training-outcome results, and entering training scores into digital systems; liaising with students' families through online channels; and reviewing commendation-discipline matters and faculty/department-level scholarships based on digitised data.

According to Zimmerman's (2002) theory of self-regulated learning, as applied by Nguyen Hong Chi (2021) to the Vietnamese academic-advising context, this may be the position that plays the most important and directly proximate role in supporting the development of students' self-directed learning capacity — a capacity of growing importance as learning becomes more flexible in space and time within the digital environment (Bond et al., 2020).

Regarding the relationship among the three positions, King (2008), in classifying models of organising academic-advising services (centralised, decentralised, and shared/hybrid), warned that the decentralised model — which bears many similarities to the way the three SA job positions are organised in Vietnam — carries a latent risk of inconsistent service quality across faculties/institutes in the absence of a coordination and standardisation mechanism from the school-level management position. In the digital environment, this risk may become even more pronounced if digital competency is uneven between the full-time specialist position (which typically has more regular access to, and training in, technology owing to the nature of the work) and the concurrently assigned academic-advisor position within faculties (which prioritises resources for teaching expertise) — potentially leading to a

digital divide within the SA workforce itself. This is a hypothesis that needs to be verified through practical surveys in subsequent studies.

3.3. *Quality and Competency Requirements to Meet the Demands of Each Job Position in the Context of Digital Transformation*

Building on the analysis of the characteristics, functions, and tasks of the three job positions in Section 3.2, it is possible to selectively apply and compare against the Digital Competency Framework for Learners (Ministry of Education and Training, 2025a) and the four-pillar competency framework of Lochtie et al. (2018) in order to identify an initial system of five groups of quality and competency requirements (Table 1). It should be noted that the Digital Competency Framework for Learners was designed for learners, not for professional personnel; the article therefore only selectively draws on the structure of its six digital-competency domains as an initial reference framework for Group (2) Foundational Digital Competency, while adding competency groups specific to professional SA staff (Groups 3 and 4) that the learner-oriented framework does not address, such as learner-data governance, counselling and support, and work organisation and coordination. The priority level of each competency group differs by job position, since it is tied to the specific tasks analysed in Section 3.2 (Table 2) — a point of departure from the existing academic-advisor competency framework (Pham Thi Ngoc Lan, 2022), which proposed a single framework for a relatively homogeneous group of subjects and did not differentiate across multiple job positions, as this article's approach does. Specifically:

Table 1. Groups of General Quality and Competency Requirements for Personnel Carrying Out Student Affairs Work in the Context of Digital Transformation

Group	Specific Content
(1) Political Quality, Ethics, and Professional Responsibility in the Digital Environment	Firm political steadfastness when operating in cyberspace; the ability to identify and counter false or malicious information; adherence to digital ethics; awareness of protecting students' personal data in accordance with legal regulations; and a sense of responsibility and role-modelling in digital culture.
(2) Foundational Digital Competency	Exploiting, evaluating, and managing digital data and information; communicating and collaborating in the digital environment; creating digital content for SA communication; digital safety and security; and problem-solving in the digital environment — selectively drawn from the six digital-competency domains of Circular No. 02/2025/TT-BGDĐT.
(3) Professional and Operational Competency in Student Affairs Work in the Digital Environment	Operating the HEMIS system and student-management software; analysing data to advise on policy; providing remote counselling and support to students; organising political and ideological education on digital platforms; and managing communication crises and psychological crises in cyberspace.

(4) Organisational, Coordination, and Digital Cooperation-Mechanism-Building Competency	Designing processes and standardising interoperable data across job positions; coordinating work assignments in the digital environment; and building monitoring mechanisms to ensure consistent SA service quality across units.
(5) Adaptability and Continuous Learning Competency	Proactively keeping up to date with new technologies and digital tools; self-assessing and developing personal digital-competency development plans; and sharing knowledge with, and guiding, colleagues to jointly develop digital competency.

This is an initial system of competency-requirement groups, not yet a complete competency framework with full behavioural indicators and proficiency levels — this content needs to be further developed in subsequent empirical studies.

Table 2. Priority Competency Requirements by Job Position (Identified from the Analysis in Section 3.2)

Job Position	Priority Competency Group(s)	Basis for Determination (from Section 3.2)
School-level management and leadership	Group (4) Organisation and Digital Coordination; Group (1) Political Quality and Accountability	Derived from the tasks of strategic planning, policy issuance, and accountability described in Section 3.2.1. This position prioritises the above competency groups but still requires sufficient digital competency to read, analyse, and interrogate data for decision-making — it does not mean this position “does not need” digital competency.
Specialist officers at the SA office/centre	Group (3) Digital Professional/Operational Competency; Group (2) Foundational Digital Competency	Derived from the characteristic of being the position that directly operates systems and handles daily digital operations, as described in Section 3.2.2 — requiring the highest degree of depth among the three positions.
Student affairs work within faculties/institutes (academic advisors, faculty assistants)	Group (5) Adaptability and Continuous Learning; the counselling-and-direct-support component of Group (3)	Derived from the concurrent nature of the role and the degree of direct interaction with students described in Section 3.2.3 — digital competency requirements need to be “adequate and practical,” avoiding overload relative to the primary teaching/professional duties.

In sum, the system of quality and competency-requirement groups presented above was constructed based on the analysis of the actual characteristics, functions, and tasks of each job position in Section 3.2, combined with a selective comparison against existing reference frameworks, with a view toward practical applicability in the planning, training, and professional development of SA personnel at universities. This is an open system that needs to be further specified into component competencies, behavioural indicators, and assessment evidence in subsequent studies.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the theoretical research findings presented above, the article proposes several initial recommendations that require further survey and impact assessment before formal application:

- A formal digital-competency framework, differentiated by job position, should be developed for SA personnel, rather than applying a single framework to all three positions, to serve as a reference basis for recruitment, training, professional development, and evaluation.
- Digital-competency training programmes could be designed and differentiated by job position: the management position needs content on data-driven governance and digital strategic planning; the specialist-officer position needs in-depth content on system operation and data analysis; and the academic-advisor/faculty-assistant position needs concise, practical content that avoids overloading concurrently assigned personnel — however, the specific level and form of training should be based on a survey of actual needs.
- A coordination mechanism should be established to standardise data and SA service quality across the three job positions, with the school-level SA office/centre acting as the focal point, in order to limit the risk of an internal digital divide, as hypothesised in Section 3.2.3.

- Developing and implementing remuneration policies, standard workload norms, or a separate allowance for concurrently assigned academic advisors is a direction worth considering, but specific survey research on workload and actual levels of overload is needed before proposing formal application, as this article does not currently have quantitative data on this issue.

V. CONCLUSION

Digital transformation is profoundly changing the content and methods of carrying out student affairs work at Vietnamese universities, with differing impacts on each job position among the personnel jointly involved in SA work. The article's contribution is reflected in three respects: conceptually, the article proposes the approach of "SA personnel" as comprising three job positions that differ in legal status, rather than treating them as a single, homogeneous professional workforce; methodologically, the article proposes a process of inferring competency requirements from the analysis of the actual characteristics and tasks of each job position; and practically, the system of five groups of quality and competency requirements, together with the table differentiating priority levels by job position, may serve as an initial reference basis for universities in developing training and professional-development programmes for SA personnel.

As this is a theoretical study, the proposed results should be regarded as an initial scientific hypothesis. Future research should conduct large-scale quantitative surveys to test the appropriateness of the proposed competency-requirement system for each job position across groups of universities with different scales and training characteristics, while also further specifying it into a complete competency framework with clear behavioural indicators and proficiency levels.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bond, M., Buntins, K., Bedenlier, S., Zawacki-Richter, O., & Kerres, M. (2020). Mapping research in student engagement and educational technology in higher education: A systematic evidence map. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 17(1), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0176-8>
- [2] Bui, P. T., & Nguyễn, V. B. H. (2026). Factors affecting the effectiveness of supporting students' self-directed learning: An approach from academic advising in the context of higher-education digital transformation. *Journal of Education*, 26(11), 100–107.
- [3] Central Executive Committee. (2024). Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW dated December 22, 2024, on breakthroughs in the development of science, technology, innovation, and national digital transformation.
- [4] Government of Vietnam. (2025). Resolution No. 71/NQ-CP dated April 1, 2025, on the Government's Action Programme to implement Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW.
- [5] King, M. C. (2008). Organisation of academic advising services. In V. N. Gordon, W. R. Habley, & T. J. Grites (Eds.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (2nd ed., pp. 242–254). Jossey-Bass.
- [6] Lochtie, D., McIntosh, E., Stork, A., & Walker, B. (2018). *Effective personal tutoring in higher education*. Critical Publishing.
- [7] Ministry of Education and Training. (2021). Circular No. 09/2021/TT-BGDĐT on the management and organisation of online teaching.
- [8] Ministry of Education and Training. (2023). Circular No. 20/2023/TT-BGDĐT on job positions in public higher-education institutions.
- [9] Ministry of Education and Training. (2025a). Circular No. 02/2025/TT-BGDĐT dated January 24, 2025, stipulating the Digital Competency Framework for Learners.
- [10] Ministry of Education and Training. (2025b). Circular No. 18/2025/TT-BGDĐT on school counselling and school social work.
- [11] Ministry of Education and Training. (2026a). Circular No. 40/2026/TT-BGDĐT dated May 15, 2026, on student affairs.
- [12] Ministry of Education and Training. (2026b). Draft circular on higher education institution standards (under public consultation; not yet legally effective).
- [13] Nguyễn, H. C. (2021). Developing independent self-study competency for teacher-training students through academic advising activities [Research project]. Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences.
- [14] National Assembly of Vietnam. (2025). Law on Higher Education (Law No. 125/2025/QH15), adopted on December 10, 2025.
- [15] Phạm, T. N. L. (2022). Developing the academic-advisor workforce at technical teacher-training universities based on a competency approach [Doctoral dissertation in Educational Science]. Vinh University.
- [16] Prime Minister of Vietnam. (2020). Decision No. 749/QĐ-TTg dated June 3, 2020, approving the National Digital Transformation Programme to 2025, with Orientation toward 2030.
- [17] Prime Minister of Vietnam. (2021). Decision No. 942/QĐ-TTg approving the Strategy for E-Government Development toward Digital Government for 2021–2025, with Orientation toward 2030.
- [18] Prime Minister of Vietnam. (2022). Decision No. 131/QĐ-TTg dated January 25, 2022, approving the Scheme on Strengthening the Application of Information Technology and Digital Transformation in Education and Training for 2022–2025, with Orientation toward 2030.
- [19] Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(2), 64–70. <https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102-2>