

RESEARCH LABORATORY/ LABORATOIRE DE RECHERCHE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE WRITING AND EDITING OF SCIENTIFIC PAPERS - AN INVESTIGATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

Pedagogical research is an action underpinning observation and investigation that allows for the awareness, improvement or innovation of the educational phenomena. The educational research methodology is one of the subjects in the curriculum of the teacher training programme - Level II, provided by Departments of Teacher Training. The aim is to develop the competence of pre-service teachers regarding the design, planning and conducting of research in the educational field, and capitalizing on their results.

Based on the assumption that a scientific paper following a research process is the proof of the level and quality of professional training, highlighting a synthetic correlation between basic knowledge and the practical-methodological skills that the Master's students have acquired during the initial training programme (Level I), the current paper represents an investigative approach meant to provide data regarding the Master's students' perception of the requirements for the writing and editing of scientific papers.

Key words: *Pedagogical research, Scientific paper, Writing requirements, Academic style.*

1. Introduction

When writing a scientific paper, the basic requirement is that it should meet the standards of rigorous research, i.e. the requirements for quality assurance with respect to both form and content. The scientific approach must demonstrate the scientific knowledge of the field concerned, contain elements of originality in the development of or solution to the research topic, as well as ways of scientific validation.

The scientific paper is the result of a precise, argumentative approach, underlying clearly formulated hypotheses and aiming to validate them from an

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original perspective, the emphasis being placed on the rigour of the theoretical framework, showing a critical attitude, and/or on the design and development, on the practical actions, on the logic and validity of the arguments, on the coherent actin at all the writing stages.

Choosing the topic represents the first step in the writing of a scientific paper. When addressing the selected topic, it is advisable to take into consideration the following requirements (*Ghid pentru scrierea academică /Guide for academic writing*, 2016):

- the paper should tackle a topic which is relevant to knowledge advancement, raising scientific interest in the field, being updated and innovative;
- the paper should underpin a clear and rigorous framework, which will prove the author's scientific thinking by revealing the formulated ideas, the scientific research methods used and the coherence of the research findings;
- the text should have fluency and cohesion, to express the logical flow of ideas, following "a red thread" in strict accordance with the object of the research;
- the paper should be written in the academic style appropriate to the research field addressed;
- the paper should meet the criteria of originality;
- the data and information, as well as the terms used, the notions applied and the concepts discussed, no matter if they have been borrowed in Romanian or translated from another language, must be used accurately, according to their definition or destination and the purpose of the research;
- the technical terms of foreign origin, pertaining to the field of analysis, enshrined in the mainstream literature, may be used in the international language of origin, but a translation of new terms may be provided, on condition that the original term is also present.

In the mainstream literature various suggestions are made regarding the selection of the topic. It is recommended, among other things, to avoid (Joița, 2003; Bocoș, 2003):

- focusing on aspects / topics that are too broad, too complex or too demanding, which cannot be operationalized and addressed effectively;
- repeating research that has been already completed and that has clarified the issues addressed;
- formulating research topics such as truisms, trivia, statements to which the status of problem is assigned, but which lack the amount of uncertainty absolutely necessary for a topic to secure the beginning of the research;
- not ensuring the correlation between the topic, the title of the research, the titles of the chapters and their content; it is worth emphasising the importance of the research hypothesis and the correspondences to be established between the topic / title of the research and the research aim, hypothesis, the content / essence of the investigations and the research findings and the conclusions drawn (i.e., correspondences between any two elements of the presented ones and their global correspondence).

Among the characteristics of a scientific paper, we can mention (Radu, f.d): *it displays the essential qualities of a text: fluency, cohesion, eloquence; it has one or more well-specified authors; it is original*; two aspects need to be discussed here:

a) Originality does not necessarily mean addressing a topic that has not been tackled before. In fact, such an intention would be unattainable. A paper is original if : it assimilates, presents existing scientific information in a personal and nuanced manner; it orders, explains and / or comments on existing theoretical data (compilations, anthologies, stories); it interprets concepts or theories in the field; it corrects or counterargues one or more theoretical perspectives previously presented by other authors; it promotes and maintains its author's own perspective on a theoretical issue in the field.

b) On the other hand, originality presupposes intellectual honesty. Originality involves that the text is entirely the product of one's own efforts.

A scientific paper should capitalize on the researcher's knowledge, vision, critical thinking, skills and abilities. In order to achieve this goal, the writing of the research paper should meet the following requirements: the major criterion in selecting the topic must be the advantage that it can offer for further training and professional development; the subject area and the researched topic must be correlated with the academic specialization; the topic of the paper will ensure the possibility of researching at the most general as well as most specialized knowledge level of interest.

- *It is subordinated to a scientific field or it has an interdisciplinary nature;*
- *It shows relevant (interesting), likely and clearly formulated hypotheses;*
- *The hypotheses are consistently supported both by prior documentation and by the rigor of the theoretical framework presented in the paper;*
- *It fully complies with the linguistic norms in force;*
- *It follows the conventions of the academic style.*

2. The structure of scientific papers

The drawing up of a scientific paper should be based on the following structure (Mogonea, Mogonea, Popescu, Stefan, 2012, pp. 37-39):

a) *Introduction* (which, in general, comprises the rationale, the importance and the relevance of the theme, the structure of the paper; also in the *Introduction*, the author can briefly present the structure of the work, divided by chapters and subchapters, bibliography and annexes);

b) *The theoretical part* (the foundation on which the practical, experimental part is built; the essential theoretical aspects regarding the topic that constitute the object of the paper are presented, explained);

c) *The applied, experimental part* (presenting the research, as designed, planned, conducted, completed).

The *Introduction* of a scientific paper should convince the readership, through relevant information and explanations, that there is an important and up-to-date scientific and / or technological issue, for which the paper in question offers reasonable solutions. More specifically, the *Introduction* must meet basic

requirements such as (Dragomir, f.d.): it sets out the issue addressed in the paper; it describes, based on bibliographic references, the evolution and current state of research in the field; it supports and describes the need for developing new research; it defines the main aims of the research presented in the paper within the new research identified above as necessary; it reviews the methods and means of investigation that will be used to achieve these objectives, using, as appropriate, bibliographic references; it informally predicts the research outcomes.

The Conclusions synthesize both the theoretical and the practical-experimental aspects. Usually, the conclusions highlight aspects related to the testing of the research hypotheses, their validity; whether the aims were achieved or not; the difficulties encountered; original contributions, methodical contributions; solutions to solve the problem; opening up of other research directions; proposals to optimize the topic in other circumstances, etc.

More specifically, the *Conclusions* of a paper: briefly present the main outcomes of the research carried out; highlight and advocate the novelty, value and applicability of the obtained results; indicate the future directions of action necessary to strengthen, supplement, generalize the relevant outcomes of the research carried out.

3. Academic style – a prerequisite for writing and editing scientific papers

Writing a scientific paper is a complex process, which underpins specific knowledge and skills. A scientific paper must comply with academic norms, it should not be a mere compilation of information taken from various sources; it should also include its own, original, interesting points of view, which can be scientifically proven. There is also need for a critical attitude towards the sources consulted. In addition, it is recommended to have logical and coherent cross-sections between the chapters, sub-chapters and paragraphs of the paper. The terms and concepts should be defined and used correctly. References should be made based on well known works, avoiding the excessive use of web resources. The use of quotations should be justified and balanced (*Metodologie pentru alcătuirea lucrărilor științifice elaborate în cadrul Departamentului-Catedra UNESCO pentru schimburi interculturale și interreligioase / Methodology for the writing of scientific papers within the Department-UNESCO Chair for intercultural and interreligious exchanges*, pp. 8-9).

More precisely, the scientific style implies: a) **coherence and cohesion**: logical flow of the text sequences, the reader-oriented principle, the graphic and linguistic substantiation of the logical connections; b) **objectivity** - involving the selection and honest presentation of the theoretical opinions and facts discussed, avoidance of deliberate distortions and decontextualisation; c) **ownership and precision** in the use of the appropriate scientific terminology - the author has the obligation to understand the concepts and notions that s/he uses, to opt for a certain interpretation of them if there are more available, and, eventually, to define his/her own proposed concepts; d) **consistency** - it concerns the adopted style (personal / impersonal), i.e., the degree of involvement, deliberate and assumed subjectivity in

the authored text; e) **clarity** - it aims at need for the optimal form of the linguistic expression, avoiding ambiguities, confusions, etc.;

f) **concision and simplicity** - plain and economical expressions are the most elegant and effective solution.

Any scientific paper is accompanied by bibliographical references, which is, in fact, one of the specific traits of the academic style. Any scientific paper is accompanied by bibliographical references, which is, in fact, one of the specific traits of the academic style.

Quotations are mere reproductions of fragments of a work, of the words or ideas belonging to another person, usually with the exact indication of the source, in order to reinforce or illustrate ideas or arguments (Mogonea, Mogonea, Popescu, Stefan, 2013, p. 24). "Quotations should not exceed 28 lines of text, and no more than two or three short quotations should appear on a manuscript page" (Chelcea, p. 83 - our translation). In addition, quotations must be faithful, in other words, any quotation must indicate the source, and the text must be transcribed with maximum fidelity - if we remove parts of the quotation we must warn the reader "by inserting gaps for the part left behind" (Eco, 2000, p. 174 - our translation). We summarize below some of the basic requirements for writing a scientific paper (adapted from Bocoş, Jucan, 2008; Ionescu 2007):

**Table no. 1. Requirements for writing scientific papers
(adapted from Bocoş, Jucan, 2008; Ionescu 2007)**

Academic writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The content of the paper should be organized logically according to a (semi) algorithm: introduction (rationale); body, organized into chapters and sub-chapters, structured on two parts (theoretical and applied); conclusions; bibliography, annexes; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The chapters should be balanced in length, style of writing and editing; • The development of the chapters should be relevant for the topic addressed; • The introduction should clearly show the importance and motivation of choosing the topic, as well as the structure and organisation of the chapters; • The content should be clear and detailed enough to support the reader's orientation; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conclusions should be clear, concise, essentialized and clarifying; • The text comprehension should be enhanced; • The accuracy of the writing style (no exaggerated listings, inaccuracies, redundancies, language deficiencies); • • The language - in compliance with the field specificity, the lexical choices should pertain to the scientific style; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Observance of punctuation rules; • • The diagrams, figures, graphs, tables should be correlated with the content of the chapters; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • The information transmitted by the illustrations, diagrams, figures, graphs, tables should be suggestive, clarifying and interesting for the prospective readers; • • The illustrations should be correctly placed on the page in relation to the written text, and correctly numbered;

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- • There should be consistency in point of formatting (types of letters, font size, margins, page layout, numbering of chapters, sub-chapters, figures, tables, etc.) and so on.
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A scientific paper should reflect knowledge acquisition, from the theoretical and applied point of view, more precisely, the level of acquired knowledge and competences, in accordance with the European standards imposed (Păiși Lăzărescu, Tudor, Stan, 2011, pp. 8-9):

- *general knowledge; specialized knowledge; general competences* (referring to: the collection, analysis and interpretation of data and information from a quantitative and qualitative point of view, from various alternative sources; the use of different modes of written and oral communication, including communication in a foreign language; use of information technologies ; assuming responsibility for an individual development plan; designing and conducting field-specific processes);

- *specific cognitive skills* (applying the key concepts, theories and methods of investigation in the field, for the design of projects and professional approaches; the ability to synthesize and interpret a set of data, to solve basic problems and to evaluate the possible conclusions; the independent analysis of some problems and the ability to communicate and support the chosen solutions; the ability to evaluate complex problems and to demonstrate the results of their own evaluation; showing initiative in analysis and problem solving).

4. Information mining. Avoiding plagiarism

In the drafting and writing up of a scientific paper, the following can be listed as types of sources of documentation (Dumitrache, 2009):

- *primary sources* - original scientific papers in print or online (ex: original results of doctoral theses, published as primary sources; scientific papers published in peer-reviewed journals represent mainstream literature);

- *secondary sources* - scientific texts - summaries, compilations of several papers, field-relevant information, reviews, books, monographs (e.g., the introductory part of the doctoral thesis, published as a review);

- *tertiary sources* - encyclopedias, similar works with a high degree of generality (addressing a wider audience, familiarization with the field, their citation in the bibliography is not recommended).

We emphasize some requirements that must be respected in the bibliographic documentation (Mogonea, Mogonea, Popescu, Ștefan, 2013):

- the authors selected must be specialists in the field or topic addressed;
- the works should be relevant, illustrative for the topic addressed;
- • the sources should be updated and original.

Bibliographic documentation involves consulting, reading specialized works that address the topic, the corresponding problem, either in an exhaustive or tangential manner. Documentation is required for:

- • clarification and definition of the basic, key concepts;

- • clarification of the main theoretical aspects of the topic;
- • awareness of the research carried out on the topic, in order to avoid repetition;
- • compilation of the thematic bibliography, by categories of sources;
- • establishing, intuiting the possibilities of finding solutions for unresolved issues;
- • drawing up a preliminary plan for improved research.

The data obtained from such ordered, structured documentation will then be critically analyzed, commented on, interpreted in an adequate way.

For documentation purposes, the possibilities offered by the Internet can also be exploited. However, the requirements are higher than in the case of bibliographic sources, given the large number of sources and materials that can be accessed, and their quality. Thus, the researcher must make a more rigorous selection of the data, choosing those that:

- are scientifically correct;
- have a solid theoretical foundation;
- belong to well-known authors in the field;
- are updated;
- are tested or validated in/by the educational practice.

Irrpective of their type, the researcher has the obligation to use and cite the sources correctly. Plagiarism (Lat. *plagio, plagiarius*) in any form is not acceptable in a scientific work. It can manifest in the following forms (Radu, f.d):

- the exact reproduction of texts or fragments that belong to other authors, without putting them between quotation marks and without specifying the source in a footnote or text note. (texts or fragments of any size, written on any type of media or made public by oral presentation);
- own translation of a text or fragment written in a foreign language by another author, if the translation is not put between quotation marks and the source is not indicated;
- tacit summarizing or restatement (not stated as such) of ideas in a text that belongs to another author.

Plagiarism can be deliberate (also called proper plagiarism) or accidental (happening when the citation system is misused or the source is not indicated). The following are cases of plagiarism (*Metodologie pentru alcătuirea lucrărilor științifice elaborate în cadrul Departamentului-Catedra UNESCO pentru schimburi interculturale și interreligioase / Methodology for the writing of scientific papers within the Department-UNESCO Chair for intercultural and interreligious exchanges*, p. 9):

- retrieving a text from another author, regardless of the medium used for publication (book, journal, web pages, etc.), without the use of quotation marks and bibliographic references;
- presenting a quotation from a text by another author as a paraphrase (restating an author's idea or argument), without using conventional citation signs (quotation marks and bibliographic references);

- taking over a text without clear references, altering word order, some wordings its content and / or reversing paragraphs, chapters, etc;
- compilation of fragments from several sources, without clear bibliographic references to the source texts; excessive use of other sources, to the detriment of one's own contribution.

In order to identify and use bibliographic references, it is recommended (*Ghid privind elaborarea și prezentarea lucrării de finalizare a studiilor universitare ciclurile de studii universitare de licență și master / Guide of the writing and presentation of graduation papers and dissertations*, p. 7):

- to use authentic documentation sources;
- to assign a significant weight to scientific papers from mainstream literature in the bibliographic references;
- to completely retrieve in the body of the text the references presented at the end of the paper;
- to use the following types of bibliographic references:
 - ✓ papers published in national and / or international journals;
 - ✓ books published in the country and abroad;
 - ✓ papers published in conference proceedings;
 - ✓ unpublished materials (conference speeches, doctoral theses, court decisions, etc.).

When it is not possible to access an authentic reference work and information from the original work is found in another work of another author (in the form of a citation), we must acknowledge that we use "second hand" data and quote both authors, mentioning the author's name: "quoted by", "in" or "apud" and specifying from which work we have taken the quotation.

Accidental plagiarism is defined as "misuse of the citation system, or failure to indicate the source", as a result of not knowing the citation techniques, of not identifying the source of the fragment used or of not knowing that the information is not part of the common knowledge fund or "as result of lack of information on practices that violate scientific ethics "(*Ghid Anti-plagiat / Anti-plagiarism Guide*, 2015, p. 5).

5. The investigative approach

5.1. Aim

The investigative research carried out had the purpose of finding out the opinion of prospective teachers, in relation with the norms of writing and editing scientific papers.

5.2. Sampling and methodology

In order to carry out our investigation, we used a sample of subjects consisting of 52 Master's students at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Craiova, also enrolled in the Teacher training programme in order to certify the competences for the teaching profession, Level II, 1st year.

As a research method, we selected the questionnaire-based survey, which was accompanied by the appropriate tool. The questionnaire administered to the Master's students comprised 10 different items, both closed (most of them) and open-ended.

From the point of view of the structure of the questionnaire, some of the items are of a dichotomous type, others ask the subjects to hierarchize various aspects, and the third category of items uses the Lickert scale, the students being asked to express their opinion on an abstract, scale with numerical values ranging from 1 to 5 (the lexical meaning attributed to the items being "Not at all", "To a very small extent", "To a small extent", "To a large extent", "To a very large extent". These answer variants have been supplemented by two others: "I don't know", "I don't answer" to detect the students' hesitation or unwillingness to provide an answer.

From the point of view of the content, the questionnaire followed the collection of data on the requirements / standards that the prospective teachers know and observe in the writing and editing of a scientific research paper. We mention that the subjects in the sample participated in the *Educational Research Methodology* course.

6. Presenting and interpreting findings

We selectively present the answers offered by the interviewed subjects to the items of the questionnaire.

To the question *Do you consider that the drafting of a research project should comply with a series of writing and editing requirements?*, the answers were encouraging. Most subjects (30 subjects) chose the variant "To a large extent"; "To a small extent" - 11 subjects. A number of 7 subjects opted for "I don't know". "I don't answer" was chosen by 4 subjects. The last result was disappointing. Even if, overall, the results show the efficiency of the course (*Educational Research Methodology*), it is surprising to find out that 4 subjects, although they attended the 1st semester activities centered on pedagogical research, consider that a scientific work should not meet any criteria or formal requirements. We explain these results on account of the exclusively passive participation of the subjects (probably they were only physically attending, they were not actively involved during the course and seminar activities).

Regarding the *requirements / standards that must be observed in the writing and editing of a scientific paper*, the subjects achieved the following hierarchy (Table 2, Figure 1):

Table no. 2. Subjects' opinion on the requirements for writing and editing of scientific papers

Requirements for the writing and editing of research papers	Frequency	Percentage
a) Information mining;	18	34.61
b) Text internal coherence;	16	30.76
c) Clarity and precision of language;	15	28.84

d) Logical flow of ideas;	15	28.84
e) Bibliographic references;	13	25
f) Use of tables and graphic representations;	11	21.15
g) Observance of publication requirements: format, margins, spacing, page numbering, chapters and sub-chapters numbering;	11	21.15
h) Accurate mention of sources, in compliance with the norms in force;	10	19.23
i) Highlighting the originality and value of the paper, and the applicability of the research findings;	10	19.23
j) Brief presentation of the main conclusions;	8	15.38
k) Others: spelling and punctuation.	8	15.38

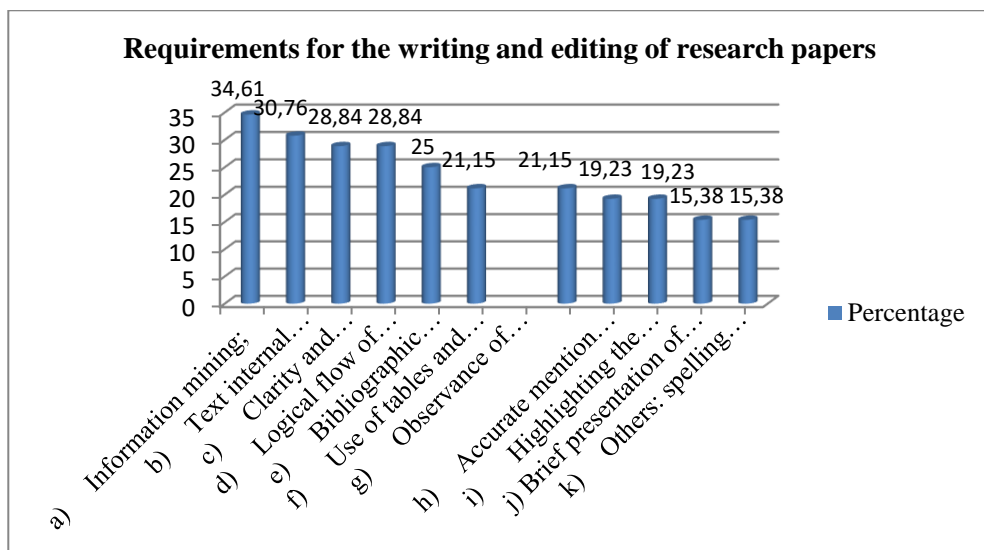


Figure no. 1. Subjects' opinion on the requirements for writing and editing of scientific papers

According to the data obtained, *the academic style of the paper*, in the students' perception, is given especially by (Table 3, Figure 2):

Table no. 3. Subjects' opinion on criteria of academic style

Criteria/aspects featuring the academic style	Frequency	Percentage
a) Defining the specialised terms;	25	48.07
b) Clear presentation of ideas;	22	42.30
c) Logical structure (sections, sub-sections and paragraphs) of the topic addressed;	20	38.46
d) Academic language/discourse;	19	36.53

e) A neutral, balanced perspective on the content of the scientific paper (balance of content and form, ideas and evidence);	16	30.76
f) Concision	16	30.76
g) Others: compliance with citation norms	11	21.15
h) Others: compliance with the rules concerning the use of tables and graphic representations alongside the text	9	17.30

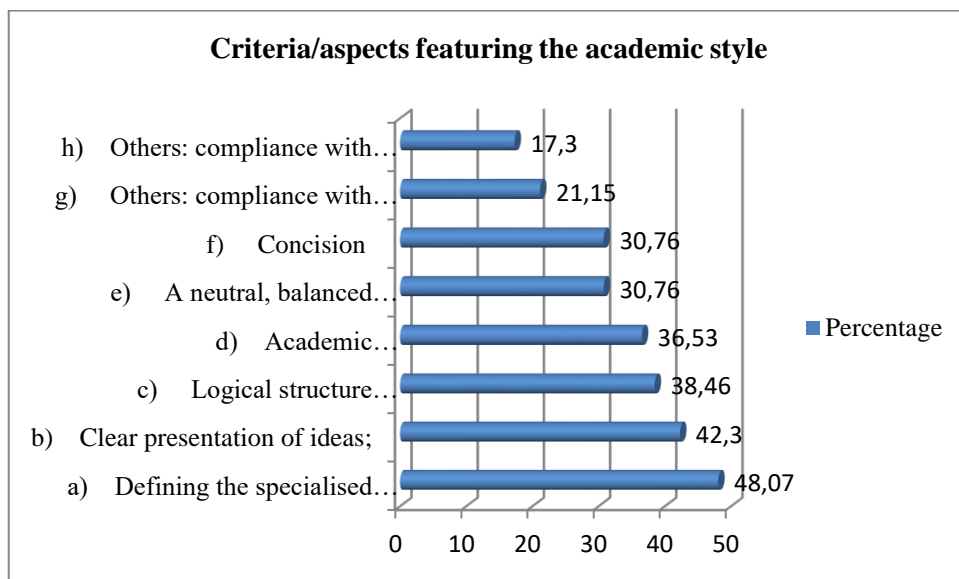


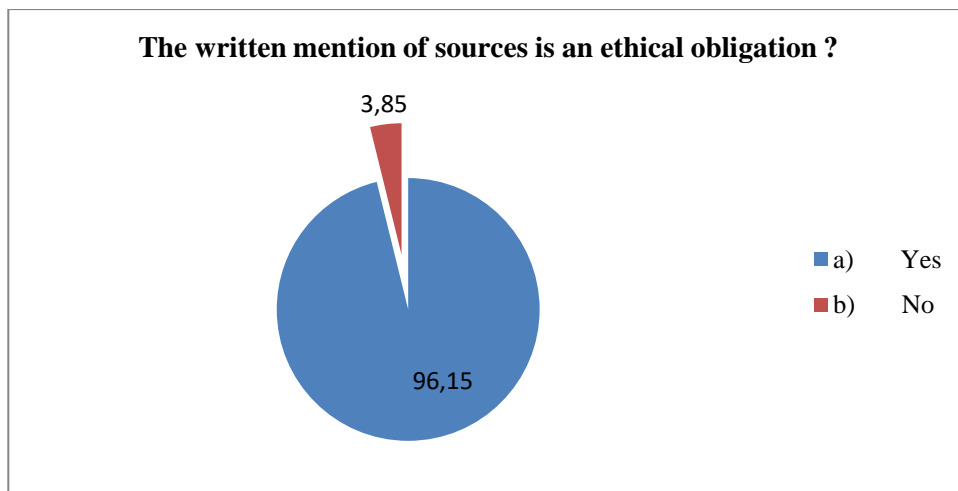
Figure no. 2. Subjects' opinion on criteria of academic style

The data in the table above show that the subjects rank the *definition of the specialized terms* topmost, as an indicator of the academic style (48.07%), on the second place - *the clear presentation of ideas* (42.30%), and on the third place - *the logical flow of ideas*. The subjects mentioned that *the compliance with the citation norms* (21.15%), and *compliance with the rules concerning the use of tables and graphic representations alongside the text* (17.30%) are other criteria that feature the academic style.

Another item of the questionnaire asked the subjects to answer the following question: *Do you consider that the written mention of the sources is an ethical obligation and, implicitly, a proof of personal honesty in the writing and drafting of a scientific paper?* Most of the answers recorded were affirmative (Table 4, Figure 3):

Table no. 4. Subjects' opinion on the necessity of mentioning the sources, as ethical conduct

The written mention of sources is an ethical obligation ?	Frequency	Percentage
a) Yes	50	96.15
b) No	2	3.85

**Figure no. 3. Subjects' opinion on the necessity of mentioning the sources, as ethical conduct**

Only 2 subjects answered negatively, probably belonging to the group of the 4 students who were not attentive during the courses / seminars of *Educational Research Methodology* which they attended (those who also stated that the drafting of a research project should not meet any writing and editing requirements).

The final editing of a scientific paper must take into account some aspects that are not to be neglected: the spaces before or after the punctuation marks must be standardized; also, in the final phase of a paper, the text must be fully printed with diacritical signs specific to the Romanian alphabet (*Metodologie pentru alcătuirea lucrărilor științifice elaborate în cadrul Departamentului-Catedra UNESCO pentru schimburi interculturale și interreligioase / Methodology for the writing of scientific papers within the Department-UNESCO Chair for intercultural and interreligious exchanges*, p. 6).

In this context, the subjects consider that, after completing the initial drafting, it is useful:

- a) to go back shortly for additions, clarifications and explanations;
- b) to read the entire work, to verify the coherence of the existing sections and paragraphs;
- c) to sending the paper to peers for a critical, constructive examination;

d) to return to the original text, after "disconnecting" for several days, carrying out successive revisions until reaching an acceptable level of the primary writing of the paper.

The answers to the question *To what extent do you consider that you have developed the skills of writing and editing scientific papers?*, upon the completion of the *Educational Research Methodology* course, were recorded below (Table 5, Figure 4):

Table no. 5. Self-evaluation of the skills of writing and editing a scientific paper, upon the completion of the *Educational research methodology* course

Aspects	1 Not at all	2 To a very small extent	3 To a small extent	4 To a large extent	5 To a very large extent	6 I don't know	7 No comment
Identification and selection of sources	3.84	15.38	5.80	38.46	34.61	1.92	0
Exploitation of sources	3.84	9.61	3.85	40.38	30.76	5.80	5.80
Synthesis of theoretical aspects	1.92	13.46	3.84	36.53	25	11.54	7.69
Design of a practical-experimental approach	3.84	11.54	5.80	36.53	34.61	3.84	3.85
Hypothesis formation and statement of aims	1.92	13.46	1.92	38.46	30.76	5.80	7.69
Application of research methods and tools	3.84	15.38	3.84	34.61	25	9.61	7.69
Accurate building of the research toolkit	1.92	11.54	1.92	36.53	28.85	11.54	7.69
Drawing relevant conclusions	1.92	11.54	3.84	44.23	23.07	7.69	7.69
Use of tables and graphic representations alongside the text	0	13.46	0	46.15	28.85	5.80	5.80
Correct citation of bibliography, in accordance with the norms	1.92	9.61	0	51.92	25	3.84	5.80

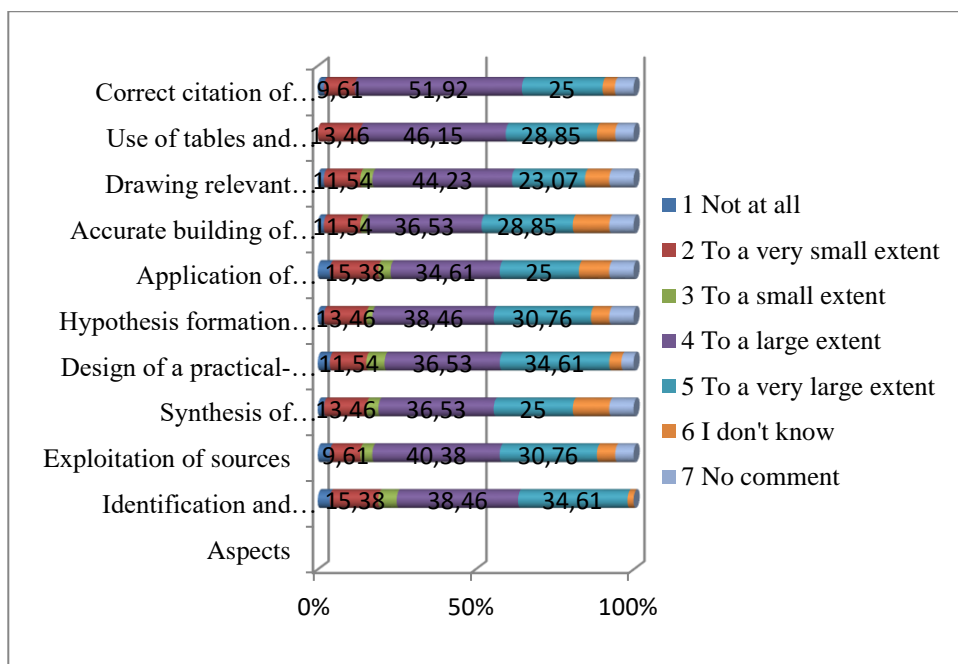


Figure no. 4. Self-evaluation of the skills of writing and editing a scientific paper, upon the completion of the *Educational research methodology* course

7. Conclusions

The data collected showed that the *Educational research methodology* course has succeeded in developing the competences of the prospective teachers in designing, planning and conducting research in the educational field and capitalizing on their results.

On the one hand, the findings show that the subjects in the sample have acquired knowledge about the methodology of conducting educational research, the about the requirements for writing and editing scientific papers; on the other hand, the subjects are aware of their writing and editing abilities, upon the completion of the *Educational research methodology* course.

The students have also developed a positive attitude towards teacher professionalization, in general, and with regard to the specific field, in particular. The answers provided are an indicator of the responsible approach to the issues of educational research.

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