

EXPERIMENTAL DATA ON THE CHOICE OF THE THEME FOR BACHELOR'S THESIS BY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT. Development of the bachelor's thesis is one of the most important and representative moments of a student's academic progress. In fact, the graduation bachelor's thesis indicates the written expression and synbachelor's thesis of knowledge, skills and research abilities acquired during the years of study. However, there are relatively few studies that address this issue in an empirical manner. Considering this fact, this article focuses on identifying the main factors guiding the student in choosing a specific theme for the bachelor's thesis, the steps taken and time spent to develop it and the issues on which the graduate is focused upon during the presentation. Based on the interpretation of the collected data, a set of conclusions is formulated aimed at identifying opportunities to optimize the coordination activity of the theses.

Keywords: *bachelor's thesis, factors, orientative coordination, stages of bachelor's thesis development, work time, self-assessment criteria of the bachelor's thesis, indicators of the success of the bachelor's thesis presentation.*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Die Ausarbeitung der Bachelorarbeit ist eines der wichtigsten und maßgeblichsten Zeitpunkte in der akademischen Entwicklung eines Studierenden. Diese wissenschaftliche Arbeit zum Abschluss des Bachelor-Studiengangs stellt eigentlich eine schriftliche Konkretisierung und Zusammenfassung aller im Laufe des Studiums erworbenen Kenntnisse, Kompetenzen und Befähigungen dar. Allerdings liegen relativ wenige Studien vor, die auf diese Problematik empirisch eingehen. Daher richtet sich diese Arbeit auf die Ermittlung der Hauptfaktoren, die den Studierenden auf die Auswahl eines bestimmten Themas der Bachelorarbeit, auf die zur Ausführung der Arbeit zu unternehmende Schritte und auf die Zeitaufwand, auf die während der Verteidigung der Arbeit Rücksicht zu nehmende Aspekte ausrichten. Aufgrund der Auslegung der erfassten Daten sind abschließende Erklärungen abgefasst worden die dazu dienen, den einheitlichen Koordinationvorgang von Bachelorarbeiten zu optimieren.

Stichwörter: *Bachelorarbeit, Richtfaktoren, Koordination, Schritte zur Ausarbeitung der Bachelorarbeit, Zeitaufwand, Auswertungskriterien der Bachelorarbeit, Erfolgsindikatoren für die Verteidigung der Bachelorarbeit.*

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1. Introduction

One of the fundamental criteria and indicators for assessing the prestige and value of a university is the quality and applicability of the theses/dissertations presented by the university's graduates. Studies in this area indicate that during this period, students allocate most of their time, energy and knowledge for the development and writing of the bachelor's thesis, which implies many cognitive, motivational, attitudinal and behavioral changes (Shih-Chuan Chen, Muh-Chyun Tang, 2011).

In this context, the role of the coordinating teacher is a determinant one, whose task is not only to assist the student in developing a consistent and logical structure of the paper, to guide the investigative approach or facilitate access to recent works specific to the chosen theme but also to provide adequate and constant motivational support. The success of writing a theses thus depends not only on valuable knowledge, cognitive capabilities and research skills of the student but also on his ability to use them alongside a very good communicational relationship with the coordinating teacher (Barrett, A., 2005).

No less important in ensuring the successful development of the bachelor's thesis is taking into account the individual particularities and specifics of each of the students. They are of various ages, have different social and cultural backgrounds, different life experiences as well as different cognitive resources, skills and work rhythms, which in turn require the existence of a very good familiarity of the coordinating teacher with the student. There are authors who further develop this idea by stating that the whole process of developing the bachelor's thesis is subject to the influence exerted by the type of relationship negotiated over the years of study between the student and the coordinating teacher based on more or less subjective criteria such as interpersonal compatibility, gender, ethnicity or religious orientation etc (Acker et al., 1994; Ellis, 2001). The importance of this fact is often emphasized in specialized literature, with authors such as Smith and West-Burnham (1993), Rademeyer (1994), Hockey (1996), clearly indicating the fact that the success of the design and writing of the dissertation bachelor's thesis also depends on the student's effort and skills as well as competencies, flexibility, interest and last but not least, the availability of the coordinator.

Moreover, other studies suggest that in the coordinating relationship of the bachelor's thesis/dissertation, the student often becomes the closest collaborator of the coordinating teacher, being deeply involved in the documentation and research of his mentor (McAlpine L. Weis, J., 2000), both of which are factors leading to an effective coordination of the bachelor's thesis and the insurance of its success (Affero, I., 2011).

Without disputing the importance of the relationship established between the student and the coordinating teacher in the development of the bachelor's thesis, we must emphasize the fact that the human dimension of the cooperation does not have to prevail in relation to the social one. Detailed knowledge of the way the student thinks and acts during the period of preparation and development of the bachelor's thesis, as well as factors influencing the effectiveness of his cooperative relationship with the coordinator constitute the fundamental premises of the optimization of this interaction and thus ensuring successful conditions for the graduation.

2. General Overview of Research

Although most authors in this field acknowledge the fact that the process of developing the bachelor's thesis is a difficult one and the quality of these works substantially influence both the subsequent academic course of the students and the prestige of the university in question, most studies address this problem from a predominantly theoretical perspective. Based on this finding, the fundamental purpose of our study is to address the theme of the development process of the bachelor's thesis through an investigative approach, with the starting point of immediate educational reality and based on data provided by concrete empirical research.

The major objectives of our research are the following:

- Identifying the main factors guiding the student in choosing the bachelor's thesis theme;
- Indicators based on which the student perceives his own bachelor's thesis as a success;
- The period of time considered necessary for the optimum development of the bachelor's thesis;
- The percentage that the bachelor's thesis should have regarding the final grade, in the opinion of the students;
- Identifying key criteria that students consider to be crucial regarding the grading of the bachelor's thesis;
- The chronology of steps taken by the students in the development of the bachelor's thesis;
- Elements of focus for the students during the presentation of the bachelor's thesis.

The primary method used to achieve the objectives mentioned above was the questionnaire method combined with the interview method. The questionnaire included a number of eight semi-open items, six of which are single-choice and two requiring the ordering of the answer options. The sample of subjects included a total of 206 students in the final years of Pedagogy and

Pedagogical education in primary and preschool learning. The processing of the results was performed using SPSS, with the main used indicators being frequency distribution, modal value, rank and rank correlation coefficient.

3. Presentation of results

The first objective of our research has been focused on the range of factors that guide the students to a specific theme option for the bachelor's thesis. The data obtained is shown in the table below.

Table 1. Factors influencing the choice of subject for the bachelor's thesis

Answer option	N	%
The challenging nature of the topic	56	27.2%
Multitude/variety of bibliographic sources	52	25.2%
Preoccupations in the field practiced during the course of studies or previous to them	48	23.3%
The simplicity of the chosen theme (minimum investment of mental, physical and temporal effort)	28	13.6%
Identification of a teacher willing to coordinate a work on your approved/ proposed theme	20	9.7%
Other choice	2	1.0%
	206	100%

As we can see in Table 1, we may distinguish grouping factors guiding the choice of a theme in two categories: the first and most significant include the novelty of the topic, the existence of bibliographic resources and previous preoccupations in the field while the second combines factors deemed less important: the simplicity of the theme and the identification of a teacher willing to accept a coordinating role. Thus, most of the surveyed students (27.2%) stated that the main factor that directs attention towards a specific bachelor's thesis subject is its challenging nature. The second factor of importance is the multitude and variety of bibliographic sources, as expressed by 25.2% of the students. Previous preoccupations in this field are among the options of 23.3% of the students. In contrast, the category of factors deemed to be less important in choosing a specific theme for a bachelor's thesis include the simplicity of its preparation, as voiced by 13.6% of subjects and the identification of a teacher willing to assume coordination, important only to 9.7% of subjects. From the "other choice" category, the most representative reasons that guide students towards the choice of a particular theme for the bachelor's thesis include the existence of certain people in their entourage who possess knowledge / skills in the field, personal life experiences related to the issues studied and the possibility of dwelling on the chosen issue at MA level.

Regarding the responses concerning criteria of self-assessment of the value and quality of the developed bachelor's thesis, the results are presented using Table 2.

Table 2. Highlights used in the self-assessment of the quality of the bachelor's thesis

Answer option	N	%
The results obtained or expected to be obtained from psychopedagogical research	38	18.4%
The mark received for the presentation	100	48.5%
Verbal assessments of the coordinator	20	9.7%
Opportunities for new investigations	46	22.3%
Other choice	2	1.0%
	206	100%

Analysis of the data from Table 2 allows us to notice the fact that, regarding highlights by which students perform a self-assessment of their own bachelor's thesis, the criterion that clearly stands out is represented, naturally, by the mark obtained during presentation, as supported by 48.5% of respondents. The second and third position, with relatively equal proportions, are occupied by the opportunities for new investigations (22.3%) respectively the results obtained or expected to be obtained from psychopedagogical research, as voiced by 18.4% of students. A less important criterion of self-assessment in terms of the value of the bachelor's thesis is concerning the verbal assessments of the coordinator (9.7%). In the "other choice" category, the most common self-evaluation criteria mentioned were those relating to the assessment of significant persons from their own entourage (parents, friends, etc.).

Another aim of our research is concerning the importance of the bachelor's thesis mark in relation to the final average graduation. The results obtained are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The importance of the bachelor's thesis mark in relation to the final average graduation

Answer option	N	%
25%	12	5.8%
40%	8	3.9%
50%	86	41.7%
75%	92	44.7%
Other choice	8	3.9%
	206	100%

The option expressed in this regard by most of the students (44.7%) expressed the opinion that the mark obtained during presentation should represent 75% of the final average graduation while 41.7% of them consider

that the correct percentage should be 50%. The number of students who opted for another percentage is relatively low, respectively 5.8% of the students for the share of 25% and 3.9% for the share of 40%. It should be emphasized that within the "other choice" category, most students share a preference for 100%, which coincides with the return to the previous form of examination.

Data concerning the time students consider necessary for the development and writing of the bachelor's thesis is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The time considered necessary for the development of the bachelor's thesis

Answer option	N	%
1 month	2	1.0%
2 months	39	18.9%
6 months	106	51.5%
More than 1 year	59	28.6%
Other choice	0	0%
	206	100%

We can notice, as can be seen in the table above, the fact that more than half of the students (51.5%) think that a period of six months is sufficient for designing, developing and writing the bachelor's thesis while 28.6% consider that they need a longer preparation time, respectively one year. A total of 39 students (18.9%) believe that two months would be sufficient to complete the bachelor's thesis and two students (1%) believe that they can finalize its implementation in just one month.

Another objective of the research was to identify the students' opinion on the criteria upon which the mark in the bachelor's thesis is based upon. The data obtained is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Criteria regarding the bachelor's thesis mark

Answer option	N	%
The novelty of the theme	20	9.7%
Original theoretical developments	54	26.2%
The quality of the investigation	116	56.3%
The variety and actuality of the consulted references	14	6.8%
Other choice	2	1.0%
	206	100%

The vast majority of subjects (56.3%) believe that the fundamental criterion underlying the grading of the bachelor's thesis is the quality of the investigation undertaken. This choice is followed by the original theoretical developments criterion, as voiced by 26.2% of the students. Criteria regarding the grading of the bachelor's thesis such as the novelty of the theme or variety

and actuality of the consulted references are important to 9.7% and 6.8% of the respondents. In the "other choice" category, no other opinions designating significant grading criteria were identified.

Regarding the chronology of steps taken in the development the bachelor's thesis, the recorded data is summarily displayed in Table 6.

Table 6. Stages of the bachelor's thesis development

Answer option	Mode	N	%	Rank
Obtaining the consent of the coordinating teacher	1	106	51.5	1
Choice of the title	2	96	46.6	2
Development of the table of contents	3	124	60.2	3
Selection of bibliographic sources	4	114	55.3	4
Writing the theoretical part	5	78	37.9	5
Wording the hypothesis	5	68	33.0	6
Realization of the research scenario	7	90	43.7	7

The data presented in the table above show that the first step in the effort of developing the bachelor's thesis is finding a teacher willing to be the coordinator. Subsequent to this approach is the choice of the bachelor's thesis title. In third place, naturally, stands the development of the table of contents followed by the selection of bibliographic resources, writing the theoretical part, wording the hypothesis and, as a last step performed, realization of the psycho-pedagogical investigation.

Another concern is regarding the aspects the students say they want to highlight at the time of the presentation of the bachelor's thesis, items shown in the table below.

Table 7. Items highlighted in the bachelor's thesis presentation

Answer option	Mode	N	%	Rank
The originality of the paper.	1	54	26.2	1
The theme-hypothesis-research- conclusions correlation	1	52	25.2	2
The practical relevance of the work	2	58	28.2	3
Verbal fluency	2	36	17.5	4
Bachelor's thesis limits	6	52	25.2	5
Presentation of the studied bibliographic sources	6	50	24.3	6

The first position in the ranking of items that students state that they will highlight during the presentation of the bachelor's thesis is held by the originality of the document. In second place, at very small difference, is the presentation of the correlation between the subject treated, the working hypothesis, the research undertaken and the conclusions derived from the investigative effort.

The third and fourth positions are occupied by the emphasizing of the practicality of the bachelor's thesis and verbal fluency in the sense of a clear, logical and convincing presentation of the work. Less important are considered to be the experimental evidence or theoretical limits of the work or the presentation of the consulted references, elements that occupy the lowest positions among the aspects that students believe should be highlighted at the bachelor's thesis presentation.

4. Conclusions

The analysis and interpretation of the data presented above enables the formulation of the following conclusions:

- with regard to the factors guiding the student in choosing a topic for the bachelor's thesis we can notice that most of them are influenced by reasons such as its challenging nature, the multitude and variety of bibliographic sources necessary for the study in their chosen field or practice in the field during their studies or prior to them while only a small proportion said that their decision was driven by the theme, simplicity (minimum investment of mental, physical and temporal effort) or finding a teacher willing to coordinate a work on the subject; this actually shows a greater availability among students to address unique bachelor's thesis issues which require effort, intelligence, imagination and creativity, with a very rare tendency to choose a subject just because it is easy to realize;
- concerning the highlights used in the self-assessment of the bachelor's thesis quality, almost half of the subjects consider that the final mark is the main indicator of the quality of their work; however, highlights such as the results obtained or expected to be obtained from psychopedagogical research or opportunities for new investigations are considered as important criteria by over 40% of the students, a situation that indicates that not only the mark itself is considered important in the self-assessment of the bachelor's thesis but also the satisfaction in relation to the theoretical and experimental results obtained;
- concerning the fair value of the percentage that the bachelor's thesis mark should represent in the final average graduation, most of the subjects (48.6%) believe that it should be 75% or even 100% according to others, a situation that reflects, in our opinion, the anticipation of the large amount of physical and intellectual effort that the development of the bachelor's thesis incurs;

- the period of time deemed necessary for developing and writing the bachelor's thesis is about six months according to 51.5% of the students while 28.6% of them state that they need a year to achieve this endeavor; however, we can notice the fact that 19.9 % of them believe that they can complete the bachelor's thesis within 1-2 months, which can be explained either by shallow or low level of expectation in relation to the mark or the fact that the effective realization of the psycho-pedagogical experiment is optional;
- the category of the criteria based on which students believe they will be evaluated for the bachelor's thesis ranks in the first places the quality of the achieved experimental approach (56.3%) and the original theoretical developments (26.2%), while items like the novelty of the topic or the variety and actuality of the bibliography are considered to be less important; we may interpret this situation as an indicator of the maturity with which students engage in the development of the bachelor's thesis;
- concerning the order of the steps taken in the development of the bachelor's thesis it is noted, as could be seen in Table 6, that it is natural except that the starting point is not the choice of the theme but finding a teacher to accept the coordinating role and only then move on to shaping and formulating the title; this indicates a relatively low interest and initiative of students in the deepening of a particular aspect, namely the educational reality;
- in regard to the issues that the students state they will focus and highlight in the actual presentation of the bachelor's thesis we can notice that the following are required: the original character of the paper, the correlation theme-research-hypothesis-conclusions, the practical relevance of work and verbal fluency.

To summarize, although the vast majority of students are correctly and clearly aware of both the importance of the bachelor's thesis and the necessary steps required to achieve this objective, we may notice, however, that almost 20% of them treat this issue lightly by stating that they could complete it in two months or even one month. Another finding is the fact that more than half of respondents (51.5%) began the process of developing the bachelor's thesis by identifying a teacher willing to accept the coordinating role and not by choosing a topic of interest, an element that specifies both the low degree of their initiative and the existence of expectation from the students that the coordinating teacher will manifest a protective, parental relationship, rather than one of partnership and cooperation.

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