

## PREPARING FOR THE LABOUR MARKET - DEVELOPING STUDENTS' MULTILINGUAL AND RESEARCH SKILLS

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of the current paper is to explore the way in which economics students from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (Romania) make use of the opportunity to conduct research in modern languages provided by the Annual Students' Conference. We resort to a quantitative analysis focused on the panels organised by the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication during the period 2016-2019. We place our investigation against the background of the 21<sup>st</sup> century job market demands for multilingual professionals with higher-order thinking skills.*

**Keywords:** student research, multilingualism, labour market demands, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

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### **1. Preliminary remarks**

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Nowadays, universities are highly interested in offering their students a wide range of opportunities for acquiring knowledge and developing skills that are on demand on the labour market. Apart from specialized knowledge and domain-specific skills, studies show that the 21<sup>st</sup> century employers are seeking for multilingual professionals and certain higher-order thinking skills.

As regards the need for multilingual abilities, according to the World Economic Forum (2018) "multilingualism is good for the economy". More specifically, "languages can help build trade relations", and "boost earning power". Conversely, poor language skills may lead to a fall in GDP. This is but one of the numerous publications that highlight the increasing importance of foreign language proficiency in all domains of activity, which is to be expected in today's globalized world.

As concerns the transversal competences need by the labour market, Manca (2018: 20) points out that

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*The OECD Skills for Jobs Database shows that, on average across OECD countries and during the period between 2004 and 2014, **the demand for high-level cognitive skills has increased**, while the demand for physical abilities and routine skills has decreased [...]. [emphasis ours]*

According to Bloom (1956), and Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), higher-order thinking skills are the ones involving analysis, evaluation and creation. Such skills are very much employed as part of research endeavours, with research being defined as “a detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover (new) information or reach a (new) understanding” (Cambridge Dictionary).

Given the afore-mentioned abilities requested on the 21<sup>st</sup> century job market, it is only natural that universities provide students with the occasion to develop and practice such skills throughout their academic studies. An excellent opportunity to combine both multilingual and research practice is the Annual Students' Conference organised by the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, in the second semester of the academic year. In what follows, we would like to explore the way in which economics students take advantage of this opportunity.

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## ***2. Economics students' research in modern languages at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania***

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Having briefly pointed to the need for students to develop research skills for their professional careers, we now present the results of the analysis we have undertaken to discover what multilingual research interests students from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE) have. We will refer to the papers submitted by Bachelor's and Master's economics students during the period 2016-2019, for the panels organised by the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication<sup>3</sup> on the occasion of the Annual Students' Conference. The aspects under consideration are: the foreign languages students choose to write in, the interest exhibited by students from different years and faculties in doing research in foreign languages, the preference of conducting research by oneself or in a team. The quantitative analysis is based on the Annual Students' Conference Programs (2016-2019) and ASE's Board of Trustees' Newsletters (2016-2019).

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<sup>3</sup> We will not refer to student papers submitted for panels organised by the Economics Departments of the University. This will be part of another study.

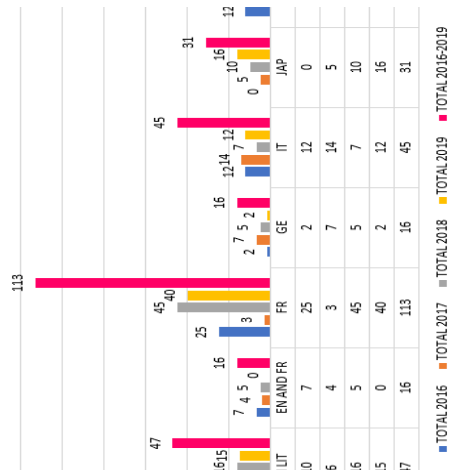
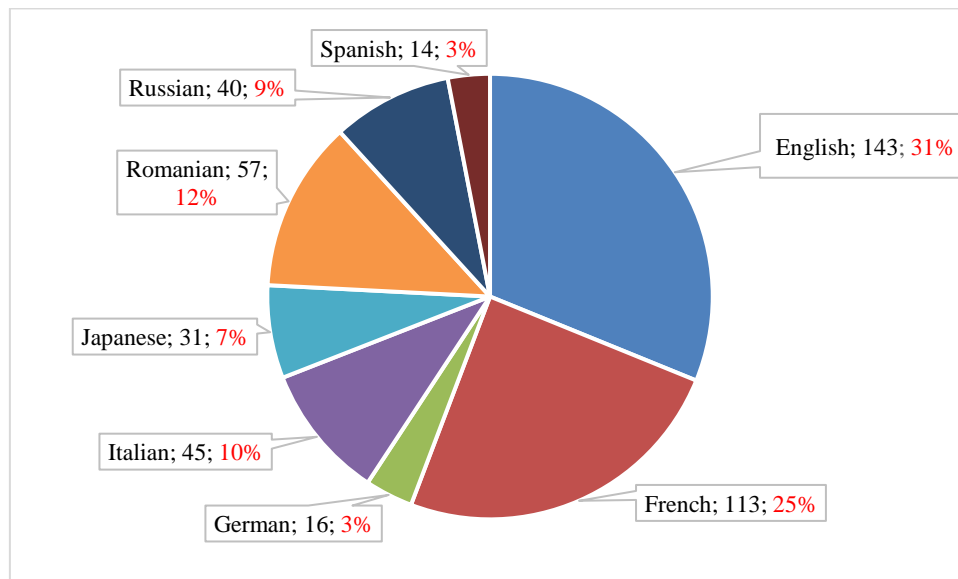


Figure 1. Student papers in modern languages

Figure 1 above presents the languages economics students from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies choose to conduct research and write in: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Romanian for foreigners, Russian and Spanish. The abbreviations stand for the topics of the panels of the Annual Students' Conference, as follows: EN = Business Communication and Culture in English; EN LIT = Leading Literary Figures in English (2016 - Shakespeare 400 Years of Cultural and Business Heritage; 2017 – Leading Literary Figures. Jane Austen; 2018 - Leading Literary Figures. Frankenstein and Other Dark Stories (bicentennial anniversary); 2019 - Arthur Conan Doyle); EN AND FR = Applied Modern Languages in English and French; FR = Francophone Culture and Civilisation in French; GE = German Culture and Civilisation in German; IT = Italian Culture and Civilisation in Italian, JAP = Japanese Culture and Civilisation, ROM = Romanian Culture and Civilisation in Romanian (for foreign students); RU = Russian Culture and Civilisation; SP = Spanish Culture and Civilisation in Spanish.

By examining the data in Figure 1 above, we notice that English is the language that most student papers are written in (with a total of 143 student papers obtained by cumulating the first three panels – EN + EN LIT + EN AND FR), followed by French – 113 papers, Romanian for foreigners – 57 papers, Italian – 45 papers, Russian – 40 papers, Japanese – 31 papers, German – 16 papers, and Spanish – 14 papers. Figure 2 below shows the weighted score of each language as percentage points in the total number of papers submitted by students for the panels organised by the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication. More explicitly, papers written in English amount to a third of all papers in foreign languages, papers in French amount to a quarter of all papers in foreign languages, papers in Romanian as a foreign language – 12%, papers in Italian and Russian – roughly 10% each, papers in Japanese, Spanish and German – less than 10% each.



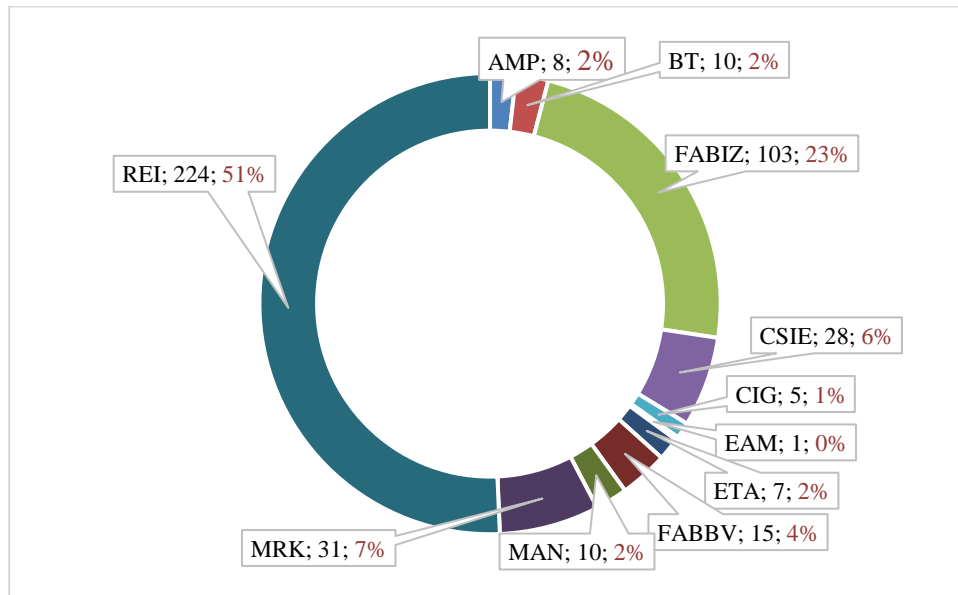
**Figure 2. Preferred modern languages for student research**

We now turn to a more detailed presentation of the preferences exhibited by students enrolled in Bachelor's and Master's programs offered by ASE's Faculties. Figure 3 below shows the number and percentage of papers written in foreign languages by students from each of the Faculties whose educational offer contains Bachelor's and Master's programs<sup>4, 5</sup>. Most of the papers are written by students from the Faculty of International Business and Economics REI – 51% and the Faculty of Business Administration in Foreign Languages FABIZ – 23%. This is to be expected since – as shown in Dima et al. (2018) – the curricula of these two Faculties contain two obligatory foreign language classes and a set of optional foreign language classes for several years of study, whereas the curricula of the other Faculties only contain classes of one obligatory foreign language for one year of study, on average. A closer look at the papers submitted by students from the Faculties whose curricula provide fewer classes of foreign languages reveals slight

<sup>4</sup> The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania has a 12<sup>th</sup> Faculty that only offers MBA programs and whose students did not submit papers for the Annual Students' Conference panels organised by the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication during the period 2016-2019. Hence, this 12<sup>th</sup> Faculty – entitled Bucharest Business School – is not taken into consideration for the present analysis.

<sup>5</sup> The abbreviations stand for the following Faculties: AMP - Faculty of Administration and Public Management, BT – Business and Tourism, FABIZ – Faculty of Business Administration in Foreign Languages, CSIE - Faculty of Economic Cybernetics, Statistics and Informatics, CIG - Faculty of Accounting and Management Information Systems, EAM - Faculty of Agrifood and Environmental Economics, ETA - Faculty of Theoretical and Applied Economics, FABBV - Faculty of Finance and Banking, MAN - Faculty of Management, MRK - Faculty of Marketing, REI - Faculty of International Business and Economics.

variations. Thus, 7% of the papers in foreign languages were submitted by students from the Faculty of Marketing MRK, 6% by students from the Faculty of Economic Cybernetics, Statistics and Informatics CSIE, 4% by students from the Faculty of Finance and Banking FABBV, 2% each by students from the Faculties of Administration and Public Management AMP, Business and Tourism BT, Theoretical and Applied Economics ETA, and Management MAN, while the remaining 1% of papers were submitted by students from the Faculty of Accounting and Management Information Systems CIG.



**Figure 3. Student papers in modern languages, per Faculty, from the total number of papers**

Figures 4 and 5 below are meant to shed light on the interest exhibited by students from different years and faculties in doing research in foreign languages. We notice that, for each Faculty, first year Bachelor’s students participate in the Annual Students’ Conference panels in foreign languages in larger numbers (58% at University level) than second and third year Bachelor’s students (25% and 14%, respectively, at University level). Moreover, we notice that some students from different years of study choose to work together (see the column entitled ‘mixed years 2016-2019’ – 2%) and that papers submitted by Master’s students are almost non-existent.

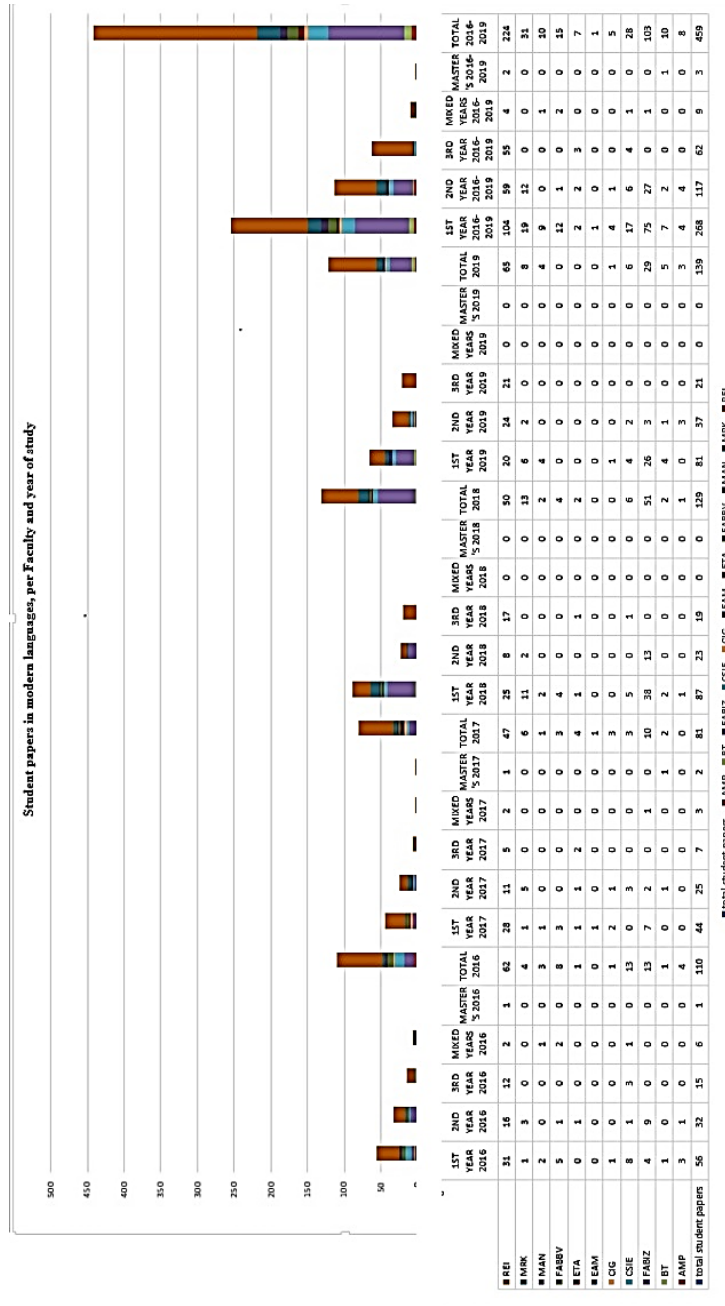
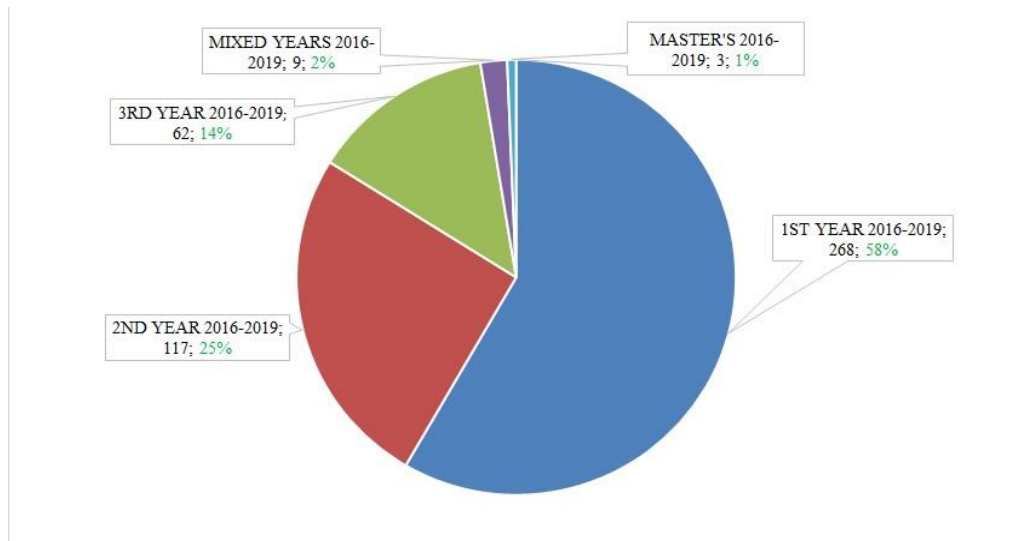


Figure 4. Student papers in modern languages, per Faculty and year of study



**Figure 5. Student papers in modern languages, per year of study from the total number of papers**

The data presented in Figures 4 and 5 are consistent with those presented in Dima et al. (2018). More specifically, foreign language classes are offered by all Faculties to their first year Bachelor's students, while only a few faculties offer foreign language classes to second year Bachelor's students (BT, FABIZ, MAN) and third year Bachelor's students (MRK and RED). Hence, it is expected that first year Bachelor's students write more papers than students enrolled in more senior years, at University level. Moreover, since the number of foreign language classes offered at Master's level is very low<sup>6</sup>, it is expected that Master's students refrain from submitting research papers for the panels organised by the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication.

Next, we present the number of student papers written in modern languages against the number of student papers submitted for all panels organised by all the academic Departments, at University level. Tables 1 and 2 below only contain rows for the papers submitted by Bachelor's and Master's students, leaving out the papers submitted by students from different years of study who chose to work in teams (i.e. the combinations of students working together were: Bachelor's students from different years or Bachelor's and Master's students, but the number of such papers is small at University level). It is interesting that economics students from various years and cycles of study choose to do research together occasionally, and this

<sup>6</sup> "an average of 2.8h of **obligatory first** foreign language classes, no hours of **obligatory second** foreign language classes, and 0.03h of **optional second** foreign language classes", see Dima et al. (2018).

aspect is not captured by the reports in ASE's Board of Trustees' Newsletters (2016-2019), where from we retrieved the information on the total number of student papers at University level, as depicted in Table 2 below.

**Table 1. Total student papers in modern languages,  
per faculty and cycle of studies**

Total student papers in Modern Languages per faculty	AMP	BT	FABIZ	CSIE	CIG	EAM	ETA	FABBV	MAN	MRK	REI	Total student papers in Modern Languages
Bachelor's students 2016	4	1	13	12	1	0	1	6	2	4	59	103
Master's students 2016	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>TOTAL Student papers 2016</b>	4	1	13	12	1	0	1	6	2	4	60	110
Bachelor's students 2017	0	1	9	3	3	1	4	3	1	6	44	75
Master's students 2017	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
<b>TOTAL Student papers 2017</b>	0	2	9	3	3	1	4	3	1	6	45	81
Bachelor's students 2018	1	2	51	6	0	0	2	4	2	13	50	131
Master's students 2018	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL Student papers 2018</b>	1	2	51	6	0	0	2	4	2	13	50	131
Bachelor's students 2019	3	5	29	6	1	0	0	0	4	8	65	121
Master's students 2019	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL Student papers 2019</b>	3	5	29	6	1	0	0	0	4	8	65	129
Bachelor's students 2016-2019	8	9	102	27	5	1	7	13	9	31	218	430
Master's students 2016-2019	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
<b>TOTAL Student papers 2016-2019</b>	8	10	102	27	5	1	7	13	9	31	220	459



**Table 2. Total student papers in modern languages versus  
Total student papers at University level**

	Total student papers in Modern Languages	Total student papers at University level
Bachelor's students 2016	103 (12.3%)	831
Master's students 2016	1	198
<b>TOTAL Student papers 2016</b>	<b>110 (10.6%)</b>	<b>1029</b>
Bachelor's students 2017	75 (8.1%)	915
Master's students 2017	2	176
<b>TOTAL Student papers 2017</b>	<b>81 (7.4%)</b>	<b>1091</b>
Bachelor's students 2018	131 (15.9%)	819
Master's students 2018	0	137
<b>TOTAL Student papers 2018</b>	<b>139 (14.5%)</b>	<b>956</b>
Bachelor's students 2019	121 (20.9%)	578
Master's students 2019	0	182
<b>TOTAL Student papers 2019</b>	<b>129 (16.9%)</b>	<b>760</b>
Bachelor's students 2016-2019	430 (13.6%)	3143
Master's students 2016-2019	3	693
<b>TOTAL Student papers 2016- 2019</b>	<b>459 (11.9%)</b>	<b>3836</b>

By examining Tables 1 and 2 above, we notice that most papers were submitted by Bachelor's students both for the panels organised by the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication, and at University level. These figures may be explained by the University's enrolment numbers – in the period 2016-2018, the number of enrolled Bachelor's students (an average of ca 15600 students) is nearly triple the number of Master's students (an average of ca 5800 students) (cf. "Annual Report of the Rector of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies on the State of the University" 2016-2018<sup>7</sup>).

Apart from issues such as languages or cycles of study, we are also interested in students' options for conducting research individually or in a team. Figure 6 below shows a rather balanced distribution of authorship options: 259 student papers in modern languages (56.4%) were written by single authors, with the remaining 200 papers (43.6%) being written by teams of authors.

<sup>7</sup> At the time this paper was submitted to the *Synergy* Journal, the 2019 Annual Report had not been made public yet. Hence, we did not refer to the 2019 Bachelor's and Master's enrollment numbers.

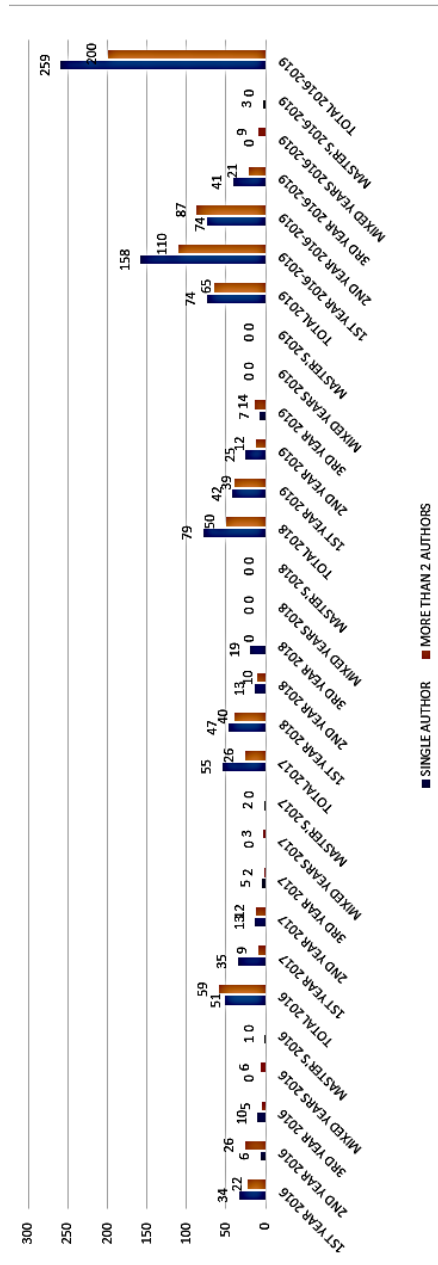


Figure 6. Student papers in modern languages, by number of authors

In sum, this section has presented the results of our analysis of the multilingual research interests exhibited by students from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies during the period 2016-2019. We only looked at the papers submitted by Bachelor's and Master's economics students for the Annual Students' Conference

panels organised by the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication. We have noticed that students do research and write in a number of foreign languages present in their curricula as either obligatory or optional courses – and that English is the language that most student papers are written in, followed by French, Romanian for foreigners, Italian, Russian, Japanese, German, and Spanish. As for the cycle of study student authors are enrolled in, we noticed that Bachelor's students write more research papers than Master's students for the Annual Students' Conference – a phenomenon visible both at University level and at the level of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication. Last but not least, as regards authorship preferences, we noticed that single authorship prevails over collaborative authorship.

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### **3. Conclusions**

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The current study has presented the findings of a quantitative analysis focusing on the student research in modern languages conducted by the non-philological students from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, during the period 2016-2019, on the occasion provided by the Annual Students' Conference held in the second term of each academic year under consideration. We have observed that economics students conduct research in all the languages offered in the curricula as either obligatory or optional classes. The latter status has an impact upon the number of student papers written in each language – i.e. most papers are written in English (an obligatory discipline for all Bachelor's students from all the Faculties). (Romanian) economics students also conduct research in French, Italian, Russian, German, and Spanish, as well as in Romanian investigating Russian or Japanese (business) culture. Moreover, foreign students have also been interested in writing papers in Romanian, to practice their skills in this foreign language.

As regards the cycles of study, we have noticed that most papers are written by Bachelor's students, both for the panels of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication, and at University level. This result is consistent with the fact that the number of Bachelor's students is higher than that of Master's students, and with the fact that the number of foreign language classes is higher at Bachelor's level than at Master's level.

We have also looked at authorship preferences and discovered that single authorship prevails over collaborative authorship. However, an interesting observation was that students who work in teams may come from the same cycle of study or from different cycles (i.e. we noticed a few papers written in cooperation by Bachelor's and Master's students).

The weight of student research in foreign languages against the total number of student papers at University level may seem low (nearly 12%), but this is due to the

fact that this paper has only looked at the culture and civilisation panels organised by the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication. Further research will focus on the student papers in foreign languages submitted to other panels on economic topics. Regardless of the type of panel student research is conducted in, we believe it contributes to the development of the higher-order research skills so much demanded on the labour market.

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