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SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION WITH STUDENTS AND CREATION OF CONDITIONS FOR STIMULATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

Abstract: The article presents a research on critical thinking and reflection problems in conducting social work supervision in practical training with 252 students from the Bachelor's and Master's Degrees at the University of Ruse, Bulgaria in the period 2014 – 2018. The purpose of the research is to identify the respondents' attitudes towards creating conditions in the social work supervision for forming and developing critical thinking and using reflection as important factors and means for analyzing and coping with problems, deep understanding of the acquired values, knowledge, skills and experience, maintaining effective feedback and development in intellectual, educational, professional and personal aspects. The methodology used is pursuant with the purpose and tasks of the research. The analysis of the results reveals a steady positive tendency of students' attitudes towards social work supervision in their practical training in the researched direction. The contribution and importance of realized supervision for the formation and development of the ability to think critically, to use reflection, to build reflective capacity and to realize reflective learning is proved. Their contribution to unity in enhancing the competence social work students, motivating them to use resources and supervision opportunities to improve the quality and effectiveness of practical training and to achievement cognitive, educational, practical and professional-personal development is presented.

Key words: supervision of social work students; attitudes towards conducted supervision; critical thinking; reflection; reflective capacity; effective feedback.

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Introduction

Supervision of social work students is a main component of their practical training which takes place in various fields of social work. In accordance with its content, organisational, technological and methodological specifics, it fulfils an essential function for realisation of the main purpose of students' practical training for integration of the values, knowledge and skills acquired during the theoretical training with good practical experience, acquisition of the basics of the professional activity, and achieving a certain degree of competence and independence. In this context, a successful realisation of supervision of social work students depends on the following factors:

A. Formation and development of ability for critical thinking related to identification and analysis of problems; receiving and assessing information from various sources, having in mind the specifics of the problems interpreted from different viewpoints; generating, analysing and assessing decisions and actions and behaviour related to them.

B. Using reflection as one of the most important tools for deeper understanding of the values, knowledge, skills and experience acquired in practical conditions and the effect of the result from their understanding, restructuring and integration on the quality of preparation and the future realisation in the profession. The development of social work students is inextricably linked to the use of reflection in

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intellectual, educational, professional and personal aspect. In this regard, reflection provides learners with the opportunity to achieve better understanding of: the current level of their practical training; the satisfaction derived from the achieved level of their practical preparation in a personal, educational and, in perspective, professional plan; determining the direction of corrections and changes in case, at their own discretion, they are deemed to be necessary in the present situation; a choice of methods and means of achieving a new level of development which fulfils both the goals and tasks of the practical training and the personal and professional aspirations.

In its function as an important component of supervision of the practical training of social work students, reflection provides an opportunity for learning based on own expertise through its research, analysis, experience and assessment to achieve a better understanding of it and have more awareness from different positions [4; 5; 6; 11]. The capacity for reflection in action laid out in the "action – reflection – action" cycle is one of the defining characteristics of lifelong learning, not only in supervision in the professional practice of social workers, but also in the supervision realised during the practical training of social work students [1; 2; 3; 8; 9; 12]. The development of students' reflexive capacity and reflexive thinking contributes to the achievement of stable results regarding acquired values, knowledge, skills and practical experience, integration of theory and practice and achievement of professional and personal development [10]. Reflection during supervision in the practical training in social work provides students with an opportunity to get an insight into the contents and meaning of the learning and practical activities realised by them and to participate willingly both in them and in the supervision which assists them in their studying and encourages their development. Their inclusion in supervision with reflexive orientation contributes not only to raising the quality of the activity carried out by them but also to achieving better interaction between theory and practice, as well as realization of a two-way transfer of knowledge and skills between the two areas. The development of the ability for reflection is an important component of supervision of social work students and in this regard offering assistance and encouraging students to realize reflection is one of the significant factors for improving the quality and efficiency of their practical training.

As a component of the supervision carried out in the practical training, reflection creates conditions for students to make a connection between new and prior knowledge, skills and experience and to develop and build upon them, to realise their own position within that connection and to expand and perfect their activity. This allows them to realise reflective learning based on learning on the basis of integrating prior and current experience as well as its refinement and development [6].

In the supervision in the practical training of social work students there is a possibility for using models of reflection which have huge importance for realising reflexive practices in the educational environment. For its purposes, a modified model of reflection can be used based on Christopher Johns' model for structured reflection [4]. Even though it was developed for a different type of assisting experts, it provides good conditions and opportunities for reflection in supervision in the practical training of social work students. The model presents the ways for efficient acquisition of values, knowledge, skills and experience, as well as opportunities for their application. Its realisation within the supervision taking place in practical training requires the following: regular, active, responsible and motivated student participation in supervision within which they are assisted, facilitated and encouraged to carry out reflection and learning through reflection; use of a practical training workbook with a certain structure which provides an opportunity for registering actions, activities, critical analysis and reflection; active use of feedback in the realised co-supervision. The modified model of reflection in the supervision in the practical training of social work students which is used in our research has a structure with six main areas. Each on of these areas stimulates reflection through realisation of an in-depth analysis and creation of conditions for experiential learning, realisation of the meaning of acquired values, knowledge, skills and experience.

The analytical and assessment component of the organisational and technological scheme of supervision in the practical training of social work students in the research conducted by the author includes certain stages and activities related with them [7]:

• summarizing individual and group supervisory working meetings between the supervisor and the supervised students;

• a summarizing working meeting between the supervisor and the university lecturer responsible for the practical training;

• supervision for the supervisor for discussing, analysing and assessing the results from the supervision realised with the students;

• final individual and group supervisory working meetings between the supervisor and supervised students for discussing and analysing the results from the practical training in compliance with the requirements of the "Framework for assessment of the values, knowledge, skills and experience acquired by the students during the various stages of their practical training in social work";

• final individual and group supervisory working meetings between the supervisor and supervised students for discussing and analysing the level of readiness and the quality of the portfolio

prepared by students, the conducted research as well as the documentation and preparation for the forthcoming defence of the conducted practical training;

• providing the supervisor with the necessary supervision for analysing and assessing the quality and efficiency of the conducted research with given type, form and level of practical training.

The provided system of activities, realised at certain stages is characterised by maintaining constant feedback and using critical analysis, learning through reflection, development of reflective thinking and reflective capacity, increasing the expertise, promoting the use of resources and the possibilities of supervision for improving the quality and efficiency of the practical training and achieving educational and personal development.

Research for identifying student attitudes towards providing conditions for encouragement and development of analysis of problems and situations, active feedback, reflection and ability for critical thinking in the conducted supervision in the social work practical training

Purpose of the research

Identifying the attitudes of students from the bachelor's and master's degree social work programmes towards the contribution of the supervision in social work practical training for providing conditions for encouragement and development of the analysis of problems and situations, effective feedback, reflection and ability for critical thinking.

Participants in the research

The research was conducted among 225 students (N = 225) from the bachelor's social work programme (88%) and master's programme (12%) at Ruse University between 2014 and 2018. The total number of students from the two programmes over the whole period of research is 252, which reveals that 89.29% of them have chosen to take part in it. The sample is unintentional and random. It provides equal opportunities for participation to all students from both educational qualification degree programmes. A small non-representative sample has been chosen in compliance with the following factors: cognitive and social orientation of the research and specific character of the interaction in the context of supervision as an activity with certain content, functional, role and technological characteristics; contribution of the implemented supervision to the formation in students of attitudes for their association with the values and traditions of the profession and the creation of conditions for value, cognitive, professional and personal development; place, role and importance of supervision of students as an interactive and pedagogical environment for analysing and coping with emerging problems and for improving the quality and efficiency practical training

in social work; carrying out a research of a problem of great importance for the value, cognitive, professional and personal development of students, their professional identity and association with the values and traditions of the social work profession; encouraging and motivating students by including them in supervision to accomplish set tasks and deal with emerging difficulties with a high level of responsibility and competence; the specifics of the subject of research in the context of practical training in social work and the processes and dynamics related to its implementation; the purpose and subject of the research and the possibility for efficient work with the sample.

Methods

The research is carried out with a tool created by the author – 'Questionnaire for a study on the attitudes of students from the bachelor's and master's degree social work programme towards implementing supervision in their social work practical training', which has been approbated, validated and which includes 7 subscales with 25 items. It is anonymous and is completed from a distance using an online form. In accordance with the purpose of the research, an analysis will be made of the respondents' answers from the subscale for attitudes towards the implementation of supervision in social work practical training for their association with the values and traditions of the profession and the creation of conditions for value, cognitive, professional and personal development. The analysis will be combined with the data from the additional question about the expected results from the use of supervision in the practical training and from the conducted interview, which is linked thematically to the questions from the research tool. Respondents' answers about their attitudes are registered using a five-point Likert scale. To verify the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's coefficient alpha (α) has been used for the sample surveyed (N = 225) through an analysis of the seven subscales. The reliability of the questionnaire is $\alpha = 0.746$, which reveals very good consistency of the questions. The study is conducted with informed consent and is voluntary and anonymous. The instructions for completion of the questionnaire include explanations of the terms used and their content and methodical specifics in conducting supervision in the practical training in social work.

Analysis of the research results in Subscale 3C "Providing conditions in supervision which stimulate and develop the analysis of problems and situations, the effective feedback, the reflection and the ability of supervised students for critical thinking"

The subscale consists of items which are used to identify the respondents' attitudes towards the implementation of supervision in social work practical training in the following fields: providing opportunities in supervision for analysis of problems

and situations and for maintaining effective feedback between a supervisor and a supervisee; creating an environment and conditions in supervision which stimulate reflection in the supervisee; development of critical thinking in the supervisee in the conditions of the conducted supervision. The elements of the given subscale are connected methodologically and content-wise with one of the most important components of supervision in practical training of social work students - the reflexive and the analytically-critical one.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of empirical data in Subscale 3C of the research tool provides an opportunity for drawing the following main conclusions:

A. Over the research period 2014 – 2018, high numerical values were registered of shares of responses with positive attitudes in the items from the subscale under review, which are characterised by distribution within the 79.11% - 87.11% range for responses with a firmly expressed agreement ("I entirely agree") and with lower values of the positive and hesitant responses ("I'm inclined to agree"), ranging from 12.00% to 19.11% (Table 1; Figure 1). The analysis of data from items in the subscale reveals low values of responses with expressed neutral positions (from 0.89% to 1.78%) and lack of responses with negative orientation, which allows drawing a conclusion about an expressed high degree of firm agreement with statements related to positive attitudes and for a resulting formation of a stable trend with positive direction.

B. The data from Subscale 3C reveal high average numerical values of statements from responses to questions about positive attitudes in all items for the entire research period from 2014 to 2018. The average numerical values of the statements in question for the period 2014 - 2016 are marked as follows: 82.12% of firmly expressed positions ("I entirely agree"), 16.43% of tentatively expressed positive statements ("I'm inclined to agree") and 1.45% of neutral opinions (Table 2; Figure 2). For the second period of research (2017 – 2018), there was a development shown in the significant rise by about five percent of the numerical values of the share of answers with a firmly expressed agreement with statements with positive attitudes (87.36%), a significant decrease of the value of hesitantly expressed positive statements ("I am inclined to agree") (11.11%) and a slight increase by 0.08% of the positions with a lack of opinion (Table 3; Figure 3). The positive change recorded on the basis of the realised quantitative and qualitative analysis in Subscale 3C of the research tool reveals clear domination of responses with firmly expressed agreement with statement with positive attitudes and a trend of gradual increase in the values of their shares, which is combined with a decrease in the numerical values of the hesitantly expressed positive statement

and keeping the values of neutral positions expressed by the respondents. This allows drawing the conclusion that there is certain dynamics which shows positive development in the attitude of respondents towards the possibilities for forming an environment during supervision which encourages and develops the analysis of problems and situations, the efficient feedback, reflection and ability for critical thinking of the supervised students. The provided empirical data and their quantitative and qualitative analysis are supported by the recorded high numerical values of statistical numbers revealing the main trend (Mean, Median and Mode), as well as by the distribution of percentiles (P_{25}; P_{50} and P_{75}). This confirms the conclusion made in the exposition above about the development in the positive trend of the attitudes of respondents. It also provides an opportunity for proving the statement about a stable positive trend.

C. The performed quantitative and qualitative analysis of empirical data in Subscale 3C reveals that the students participating in the research express a high degree of agreement with statements with positive attitudes related to:

• providing opportunities in supervision for analysis of problems and situations and for maintaining effective feedback between a supervisor and supervisee (Item C1). For the period 2014 – 2016, the highest numerical value of 86.96% was recorded for the share of respondents' answers connected with a firmly expressed agreement with statements with positive attitudes ("I entirely agree") (Table 2; Figure 2). It is combined with low values for statements expressing positive attitudes with certain hesitation ("I am inclined to agree") (12.32%) and for those representing neutral opinions (0.72%). No respondents' answers related to negative attitudes have been recorded in the analysed item and the whole subscale. The presented information provides an opportunity for drawing a conclusion about a high level of firmly expressed positions and agreement with the positive attitudes related to them. A characteristic feature of the second period of research (2017 – 2018) is the increase in the numerical value of the relative share of responses which express firm agreement ("I entirely agree") with statements with positive attitudes (87.36%). There is decrease in the value of the share of hesitantly expressed positive responses ("I am inclined to agree") (11.49%) and a slight increase by 0.43% of the value of the share of responses with a neutral opinion (1.15%) (Table 3; Figure 3). The presented quantitative information and the distribution of the numerical values of statements with certain attitudes in the highest points of the positive section of the questionnaire assessment scale is confirmed by the results from the statistical analysis, where high numerical values have been recorded of the values representing the main trend (Mean = 4.86, Median = 5.00 and Mode = 5.00) and

the distribution of the percentiles ($P_{25} = 5$; $P_{50} = 5$ and $P_{75} = 5$);

• creating supervision environment and conditions encouraging reflection of the supervisee (Item C2). The relative share of respondents' answers with a firmly expressed agreement ("I entirely agree") with statements with positive attitudes in the given item for the period 2014 – 2016 has a relatively high numerical value of 84.79%. The share of responses representing statements connected to positive statements expressed with certain hesitation ("I am inclined to agree") is 13.04%, while the share of those who have not expressed a definite position is at the low value of 2.17% (Table 2; Figure 2). The outlined positive trend shows development over the period of research 2017 – 2018, which is marked by a significant increase by about 5 percent in the value of the share of responses with a firmly expressed agreement with statements with positive attitudes ("I entirely agree") (88.51%), a decrease in the values of the shares of positive responses expressed with hesitation ("I am inclined to agree") down to 10.34% and in responses with unclear position down to 1.15% (Table 3; Figure 3). This shows dynamics of development in the positive spectrum of student attitudes towards creation of an environment and conditions in supervision which encourage reflection of the supervisee. Regardless of the presented positive trend, it is recommended that there should be more and a wider range of activities for encouraging learning through reflection in supervision in the practical training of social work and for focusing supervisors' attention and efforts on providing more opportunities for analysis and self-analysis of thoughts, feelings, experiences, activities and behaviour on the part of supervisees, so that they can acquire reflective skills and experience which are of significant importance both for students' practical training and for their future professional activity. The presented distribution of the values of statements with certain types of responses with positive attitudes in the affirmative section of the assessment scale of the research tool is confirmed during the statistical analysis, where high numerical values have been recorded of the values representing the main trend (Mean = 4.83, Median = 5.00 and Mode = 5.00) and the distribution of the percentiles ($P_{25} = 5$; $P_{50} = 5$ and $P_{75} = 5$);

• development of critical thinking of the supervisee during the conducted supervision (Item C3). The relative share of respondents' answers with a firmly expressed agreement ("I entirely agree") with statements with positive attitudes in the given item for the period 2014 – 2016 has the lowest numerical value of 74.64% among items in the subscale (Table 2; Figure 2). The share of responses expressing positive attitudes with certain hesitation ("I am inclined to agree") has the highest value in the subscale – 23.91% (Table 2; Figure 2). At the same time, the value of the

share of those who have not expressed their opinion is also characterised by a relatively low subscale value of 1.45%. No answers with explicit negative positions were recorded. The presented data and their quantitative and qualitative analysis allow to make an assumption about the presence of minimal dynamics caused by fluctuations and contradictions regarding the conditions created during supervision in the practical training for development of critical thinking in students. Taking steps in this unfavourable context leads to changes in the students' positions and attitudes regarding this issue. Over the next period of research (2017 – 2018), the relative share of respondents expressing firm agreement ("I entirely agree") with statements with positive attitudes increases significantly by about twelve percent and reaches a numerical value of 86.21%, the value of the share of hesitantly expressed positive responses ("I am inclined to agree") reduces twofold down to 11.49%, but there is a minimal increase by 0.85% of the value of the share of responses without an explicit opinion (Table 3; Figure 3). The presented distribution of types of responses about certain attitudes in the assessment scale in the questionnaire reveals that the majority of them are positioned in the upper areas of the affirmative sector and are connected with positive attitudes. A confirmation of this are the high numerical values recorded in the statistical analysis representing the values of the main trend (Mean = 4.76, Median = 5.00 and Mode = 5.00) and the distribution of percentiles ($P_{25} = 5$; $P_{50} = 5$ and $P_{75} = 5$).

In their responses in the conducted interview, some of the respondents present their positive opinion on the questions from Subscale 3C and point out the following: e.g., *"During the supervision in the practical training bases we have the opportunity to have a discussion with the supervisor regardless of whether they are a mentor or a university lecturer in practical training, emerging difficulties and problems in different situations"; "I keep contact with my supervisor not only on days when we have practical training, but also during the rest of the semester when we have to discuss important issues from the theory and practice of social work"; "The supervisors I have done supervision with try to build and develop my critical approach and thinking when analysing problems and situations"*. At the same time, there are respondents' opinions which pay attention to omissions and flaws in the conducted supervision in the practical training in social work: e.g., *"With some of the social work supervisors, my relationship after the conducted supervision over the next few days is sporadic and they are not very interested in whether I have succeeded in coping with certain difficulties or whether I have understood the topic or question under discussion. I maintain a better relationship with my university lecturer in practical training"; "The conducted supervision analyses more often than not*

are quite superficial and they underestimate out abilities to think and analyse critically problems from the theory and practice of social work", "Supervision does not contribute much to acquisition of knowledge and to building and developing skills for self-analysis, and we have difficulty filling in the self-analysis part in the practical training journal".

The responses of students participating in the research, which reflect their opinions about emerging difficulties and problems during the conducting of supervision in the practical training, it is possible that they are viewed as a result from: the fact that some supervisors ignore the importance of students' acquisition of skills for analysis of problems and situations; the excessive workload of the mentor who fulfils the role of a supervisor which prevents them from keeping a long and efficient relationship with the practising and supervised student; the insufficient level of expertise of some supervisors for using reflection and conducting a critical analysis of situations and own activities and behaviour; the lack of regulation in education in social work and of standards which specify the content, functional, role, organisational, technological and methodological, including reflective, aspects of supervision in the practical training of social work students.

The main moments of the quantitative and qualitative analysis in Subscale 3C are confirmed by the evidence found in the statistical analysis: verification of a statistically significant difference of the mean arithmetic value of the summarized results by subscale, reporting a positive difference between the mean values for Subscale 3C and value 3 (Test Value = 3); statistical values and indicators and their standard deviation; the percentiles, the asymmetry quotient and the established symmetrical normal distribution with the curve moved slightly to the left; the confidence interval of the mean arithmetic value.

Discussion and conclusions

The evidence based on the quantitative, qualitative and statistical analysis allow for drawing a conclusion about the distribution of the majority of the values of the shares of the respondents' answers related with positive attitudes in the highest points of the affirmative part of the evaluation scale in the research tool. This allows making a conclusion about a stable positive orientation in students' attitudes towards providing conditions in supervision which encourage and develop the analysis of problems and situations, the functioning of working feedback, the use of reflection and the development of the critical thinking of supervised students. The creation of an environment and conditions in the supervision of students which assist and encourage the acquisition and development of knowledge and skills in the areas in question from the given item is an important prerequisite and a factor in the realisation of supervision characterised by a high level of quality and efficiency as well as by a significant role for lifelong learning, learning through reflection, critical thinking and critical analysis of emerging problematic situations, cognitive, professional and personal development of students. The results from the quantitative and qualitative analysis provide the necessary evidence to achieve the goal of the research.
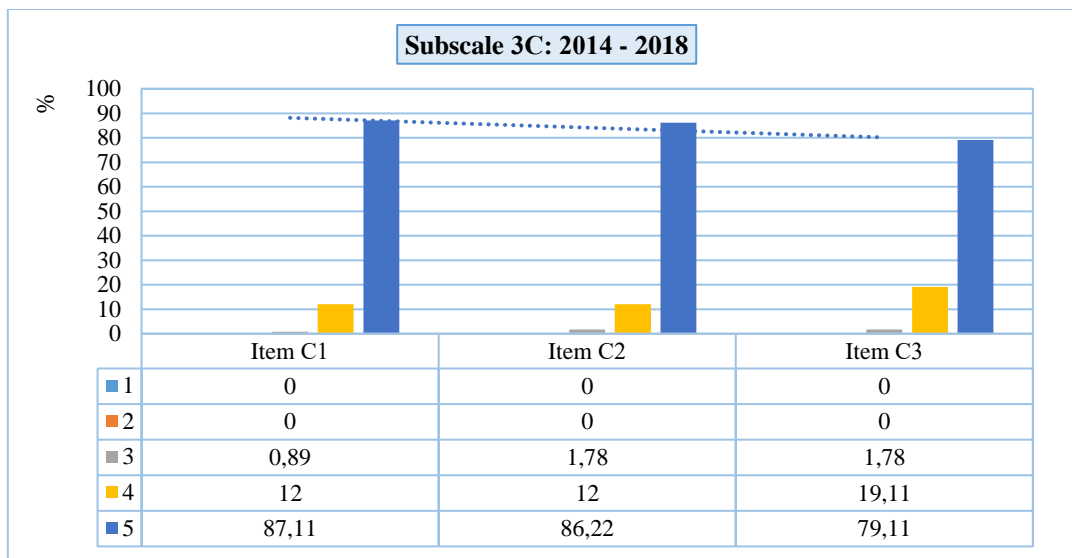
Conclusion

Supervision of social work students is a constant process in which those who prepare the supervisees receive guidance and support, acquire values, knowledge, skills and experience and are assisted and encouraged in overcoming hardships and challenges in practical conditions. It provides them with an opportunity to maintain constant feedback with the supervisor, to analyse emerging difficulties and problems by using critical analysis, to learn through reflection, to get to know better themselves as persons and future social workers and to build their professional identity. The experience acquired by students in these conditions is an important stage from their educational training, the formation of their professional and personal quality and achievement of cognitive, educational and practical development.

Table 1. **Values of the relative shares of respondents' answers on the Likert's 5-point scale in Subscale 3C: 2014 – 2018**

Item	Values of the relative shares of respondents answers Subscale 3C: 2014 – 2018 г. (%)				
	I entirely disagree	I'm inclined to disagree	I have no opinion	I'm inclined to agree	I entirely agree
Item C1	0	0	0.89	12.00	87.11
Item C2	0	0	1.78	12.00	86.22
Item C3	0	0	1.78	19.11	79.11
Average value	0	0	1.48	14.37	84.15

Subscale 3C: 2014 - 2018

	Item C1	Item C2	Item C3
■ 1	0	0	0
■ 2	0	0	0
■ 3	0,89	1,78	1,78
■ 4	12	12	19,11
■ 5	87,11	86,22	79,11

Figure 1. **Values of the relative shares of respondents' answers on the Likert's 5-point scale in Subscale 3C: 2014 – 2018**

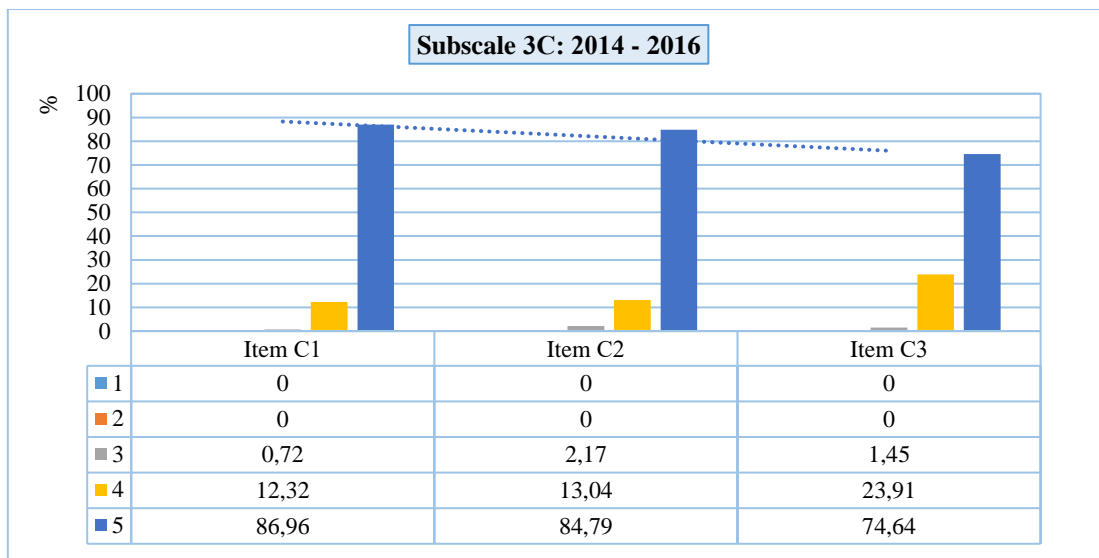| №	Assessment of respondents' answers on the Likert's 5-point scale	Conditionally designation of the answers
1	I entirely disagree	1
2	I'm inclined to disagree	2
3	I have no opinion	3
4	I'm inclined to agree	4
5	I entirely agree	5

Table 2. **Values of the relative shares of respondents' answers on the Likert's 5-point scale in Subscale 3C: 2014 – 2016**

Item	Values of the relative shares of respondents answers Subscale 3C: 2014 – 2016 (%)				
	I entirely disagree	I'm inclined to disagree	I have no opinion	I'm inclined to agree	I entirely agree
Item C1	0	0	0.72	12.32	86.96
Item C2	0	0	2.17	13.04	84.79
Item C3	0	0	1.45	23.91	74.64
Average value	0	0	1.45	16.43	82.12

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Subscale 3C: 2014 - 2016

	Item C1	Item C2	Item C3
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0,72	2,17	1,45
4	12,32	13,04	23,91
5	86,96	84,79	74,64

Figure 2. **Values of the relative shares of respondents' answers
on the Likert's 5-point scale in Subscale 3C: 2014 – 2016**

№	Assessment of respondents' answers on the Likert's 5-point scale	Conditionally designation of the answers
1	I entirely disagree	1
2	I'm inclined to disagree	2
3	I have no opinion	3
4	I'm inclined to agree	4
5	I entirely agree	5

Table 3. **Values of the relative shares of respondents' answers
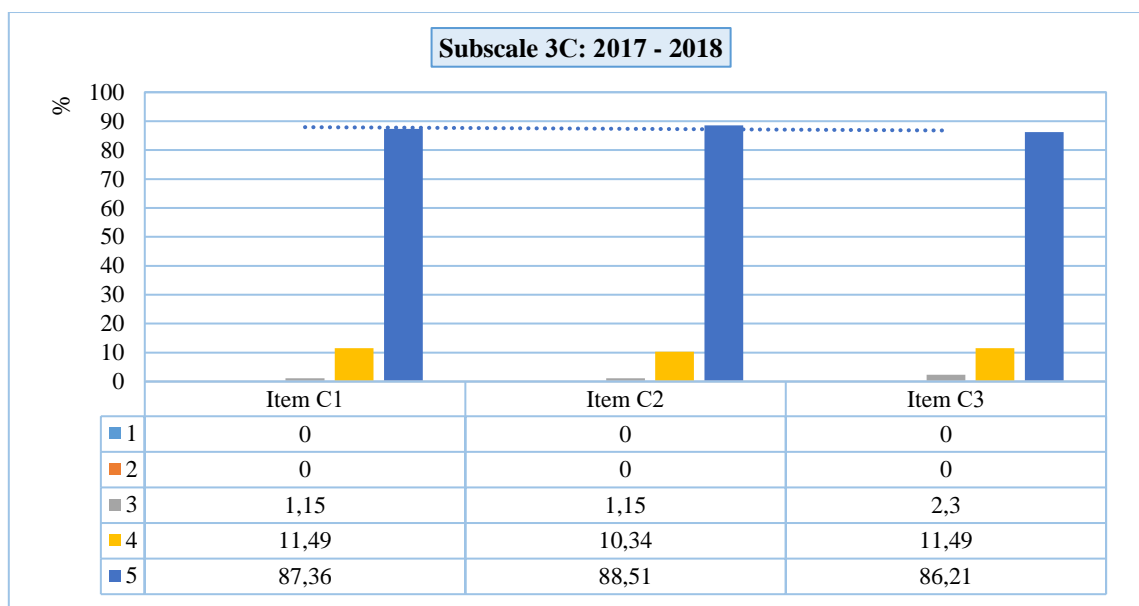on the Likert's 5-point scale in Subscale 3C: 2017 – 2018**

Item	Values of the relative shares of respondents answers Subscale 3C: 2017 – 2018 г. (%)				
	I entirely disagree	I'm inclined to disagree	I have no opinion	I'm inclined to agree	I entirely agree
Item C1	0	0	1.15	11.49	87.36
Item C2	0	0	1.15	10.34	88.51
Item C3	0	0	2.30	11.49	86.21
Average value	0	0	1.53	11.11	87.36

Subscale 3C: 2017 - 2018

	Item C1	Item C2	Item C3
■ 1	0	0	0
■ 2	0	0	0
■ 3	1,15	1,15	2,3
■ 4	11,49	10,34	11,49
■ 5	87,36	88,51	86,21

Figure 3. **Values of the relative shares of respondents' answers on the Likert's 5-point scale in Subscale 3C: 2017 – 2018**

№	Assessment of respondents' answers on the Likert's 5-point scale	Conditionally designation of the answers
1	I entirely disagree	1
2	I'm inclined to disagree	2
3	I have no opinion	3
4	I'm inclined to agree	4
5	I entirely agree	5

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