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Developing Research Skills in Freshers: A Case of Scientific Club Supervision

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Abstract. Aim. *This article explores how scientific clubs, under appropriate supervision, support first-year university students' motivation and involvement in research, particularly in the context of English philology.* ***Methodology.*** *The study is based on reflective practice and qualitative analysis of supervisory experience with first-year students at Borys Grinchenko Metropolitan University. The focus is placed on two scientific clubs at the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology. Data were collected through observation, analysis of student work, and reflective discussions during club meetings. The findings were interpreted through the lens of educational*

and developmental psychology. ***Results***. Being part of supervised scientific clubs gave first-year students a clear structure and a sense of support as they took their first steps in research. Through discipline-specific tasks, they began to acquire essential academic skills and steadily developed greater research confidence and competence. *The club «Crossroads of Cultures: From Language to Meaning» promoted critical engagement with literary texts through cultural and linguistic analysis, while «Linguistic Labyrinths: Exploring Phonetics» offered hands-on experience in phonetic analysis. Both clubs facilitated stages of research development – from orientation and motivation to independent task completion – highlighting the effectiveness of guided scaffolding. Students demonstrated increased motivation, autonomy, and academic confidence by the end of the year. By the end of the academic year, many students could identify clear research aims, were able to find research questions, choose appropriate methods for their research. The participation in the meetings encouraged ongoing dialogue with peers, which became a source of academic support and informal critique. These exchanges did not simply reinforce their understanding of research procedures; they created a space where students could test ideas, revise assumptions, and grow more confident in their voices. Conclusions. Scientific clubs, when integrated thoughtfully into the first year of study, offer more than early exposure to research. They shape thinking habits, foster steady engagement, and give students a sense of how academic work is built over time. What proves most effective is not the pace of progress but the presence of consistent support – supervisors who listen, challenge, and guide. In such settings, students begin to recognize themselves as learners and as participants in a broader academic conversation.*

Keywords: *first-year students, scientific clubs, research supervision, student motivation, academic transition*

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Анотація. Мета. *У статті досліджується, як наукові гуртки під відповідним керівництвом сприяють мотивації та залученості студентів першого курсу до дослідницької діяльності, зокрема у контексті англійської філології.*

Методологія. *Дослідження ґрунтується на рефлексивній практиці та якісному аналізі досвіду наукового керівництва першокурсниками в Київському університеті імені Бориса Грінченка. У центрі уваги – два наукові гуртки факультету романо-германських мов. Дані були зібрані шляхом спостереження, аналізу студентських робіт і рефлексивного обговорення під час засідань гуртків. Отримані результати інтерпретовано крізь призму освітньої та вікової психології.*

Результати. *Участь у наукових гуртках під керівництвом викладачів створює структуроване й підтримувальне середовище для початківців у науці. Студенти долучалися до досліджень у межах своєї спеціальності, опановували базові академічні навички та поступово формували дослідницьку компетентність. Гурток «На перехресті культур: Від мови до сенсів» стимулював критичне осмислення літературних текстів через культурний та лінгвістичний аналіз, а «Мовні лабіринти: досліджуємо фонетику» забезпечили практичний досвід у галузі фонетики. Обидва гуртки сприяли проходженню основних етапів дослідницької діяльності – від орієнтації та мотивації до*

самостійного виконання завдань – що підкреслює ефективність супроводу з боку наставника. Наприкінці року студенти продемонстрували зростання мотивації, автономії та впевненості в академічних уміннях. Вони також показали покращення в умінні формулювати дослідницькі запитання, обирати відповідні методи та рефлексувати над отриманими результатами. Співпраця з однолітками в межах гуртків сприяла взаємній підтримці та конструктивному зворотному зв'язку, що поглиблювало навчальний досвід.

Висновки. *Наукові гуртки, за умови продуманого керівництва, є ефективними майданчиками для ознайомлення першокурсників із дослідницькими практиками. Вони сприяють мотивації, саморегуляції та формуванню відчуття належності до академічної спільноти. Поступовий підхід у поєднанні з емоційною та навчальною підтримкою з боку керівників є ключем до формування дослідницької ідентичності студентів. Отримані результати мають практичну цінність для вдосконалення залучення студентів до досліджень на ранніх етапах навчання та підвищення рівня їхньої академічної адаптації.*

Ключові слова: *першокурсники, наукові гуртки, наукове керівництво, мотивація студентів, академічна адаптація.*

Introduction. For many students, the start of university brings several changes. Course structures differ from what they have known, and expectations are often less clearly defined. Students are also expected to manage their time more independently and take responsibility for previously guided tasks. These shifts can be challenging to manage, particularly in the first weeks of study. For many, this adjustment is accompanied by uncertainty, which is not only about their academic preparedness but also about how to participate meaningfully in the life of the university. Research has shown that students' early experiences shape their long-term engagement and success

[9, p. 18–24; 13, p. 45–48]. Feeling lost, disconnected, or overwhelmed in the first months may affect their learning motivation and even lead to withdrawal.

One way to support students during this time is through supervised research-related activities. While first-year students may lack the experience needed to complete research projects, they can benefit from guided involvement in simple inquiry tasks and peer-led discussions. Students can get a stronger sense of connection to the academic environment of their university by taking part in scientific clubs or small research groups, it can spark students' interest, help them pick up essential skills, and give them a stronger sense of connection to their academic environment [10, p. 1]. These settings also make it easier for students to understand why research matters and how it ties into real-life concerns or personal aspirations [5, p. 420]. Still, for these efforts to truly work, the supervisor's role is key – guidance must be carefully adapted to the needs of those just starting.

The role of supervisors is central to this process. They provide not only academic support but also emotional encouragement. According to Vygotsky's [14] concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, learners grow best when they receive guidance that matches their current level and helps them reach beyond it. In this context, scientific clubs can be designed as low-pressure environments where students gradually take on more responsibility. Such an approach encourages self-regulation, motivation, and a deeper understanding of learning as a shared and meaningful activity [15; 16].

The aim of this article is to examine how participation in supervised scientific clubs aids in the development of research skills, motivation, and academic integration for first-year university students, particularly in the fields of English philology and linguistics.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives have been set:

1. To analyze the psychological, social, and academic difficulties commonly experienced by first-year students during their transition to university, as documented in existing research.

2. To review the scholarly literature on student motivation, research readiness, and adequate supervision in early-stage academic development.

3. To describe the structure and activities of two scientific clubs designed to engage first-year students in supervised research within the context of English philology.

4. To explore how participation in these clubs contributes to students' skill-building, self-confidence, and academic identity formation.

5. To evaluate the role of supervisors in guiding research tasks, providing emotional support, and fostering a collaborative academic environment.

6. To highlight specific gaps in current research on early undergraduate research engagement and demonstrate how this study addresses those gaps.

7. To offer educators and university administrators practical insights on enhancing research-based learning opportunities for new students through well-designed club structures and supervisory models.

Theoretical Background. In the first weeks of university, students often find themselves adjusting to very different ways of learning. Lecturers may expect more independence, and formal instruction is usually less frequent and less personalised than what students experienced at school. Managing one’s own time and workload becomes essential, yet many are still figuring out how to do this effectively. For students living away from home for the first time, the adjustment is often more complex. New routines, unfamiliar surroundings, and the absence of established social ties can make the transition slower and more challenging than anticipated. As a result, some students– despite having done well academically in the past – may begin to feel unsure of themselves or lose interest in their studies. A student's ability to adapt depends on a combination of influences, such as their earlier educational experiences, level of

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emotional maturity, and access to support–whether from family, peers, or the institution itself [4, p. 3494–3496; 9, p. 112–115]. Economic conditions and individual resilience also play a role in how students respond to these early challenges [11, p. 89–90]. Even academically capable students may encounter difficulties that affect their motivation and academic performance without adequate support. Universities that offer timely support, create opportunities for meaningful engagement, and foster a sense of inclusion can help reduce the isolation and stress many students face in their first year [1; 13]. Early involvement in research can support students as they adapt to university life. It provides an entry point into academic culture, offering practical insight into how knowledge is produced and shared. At the same time, it encourages personal engagement with study and can help students feel more anchored in the university setting. Theories of self-determination suggest that students are more motivated to learn when they feel competent, autonomous, and related to others [3, p. 320]. In other words, if students believe in their abilities, feel they have some control over their learning, and experience meaningful social interactions, they are more likely to persist and engage deeply. This motivation may be intrinsic, fueled by curiosity or intellectual interest, or extrinsic, driven by external rewards such as praise, grades, or career advancement [5]. At the same time, if students understand how research skills can help them achieve personal or professional goals, they are more likely to participate enthusiastically [12]. Encouraging this involvement requires more than just assigning projects, it also requires creating a research environment where students feel safe to ask questions, explore ideas, and make mistakes [2; 10]. When first-year students are welcomed into a supportive research culture, they begin to see themselves not just as learners but as contributors to knowledge.

Supporting student independence in research is equally critical, especially during the early stages of their academic development. According to experiential learning theories, students make the most progress when they are actively engaged and reflect on their experiences to construct new knowledge [6, p. 20-38]. At the first stage,

students should get practical skills from such activities as as observing, gathering information, trying out basic forms of analysis. These early steps may seem small for both students and supervisors, but they often help students feel more capable and involved. As they work through these tasks, they begin to pick up important habits, such as organising their time more effectively and thinking more carefully about the questions they are trying to answer. At the same time, placing full responsibility on students too soon can be counterproductive, especially if they are still unfamiliar with research processes. Developing confidence in this area takes time. It often works best when students begin with clear, structured activities and gradually take on more responsibility as they gain experience [15, p. 58–63]. Opportunities for peer collaboration, space for reflection, and steady guidance all help make research feel less daunting and more accessible.

Supervision plays a central role in fostering this balance. Good supervision goes beyond academic instruction, especially for students who are just beginning their university experience. Effective supervisors help clarify what is expected, guide students in approaching tasks step by step, and provide feedback that encourages steady progress. At the same time, supervisors model the habits of successful researchers – critical reading, systematic inquiry, and academic integrity–thereby helping students internalize scholarly values [2; 7]. Having a supervisor who is both experienced and approachable can ease much of the uncertainty students face when encountering unfamiliar tasks or academic expectations. Working with peers is crusial for beginners to change their approach to research: they talk through ideas together, offer feedback, and learn to listen to opinions that challenge their own at the meetings of scientific clubs. This kind of exchange not only strengthens their ability to think critically but also helps them gain confidence in expressing their views. Over time, the group begins to function in a way that mirrors the give-and-take of real academic settings – open, responsive, and driven by shared curiosity. These interactions create a collaborative space that often resembles the dynamics of real academic environments. In such

settings, students begin to see themselves as part of a wider scholarly community [8, p. 29–33; 14, p. 89–91]. At the same time, they strengthen their ability to communicate clearly and work effectively in teams – skills that are essential not only in academic work but in many professional settings as well.

While numerous studies confirm the benefits of early research engagement and peer collaboration, only a few explore how these experiences are structured specifically for first-year students within the framework of supervised scientific clubs [2, p. 54; 10; 15, pp. 53–61]. Most existing research either focuses on upper-level undergraduate research [7, p. 9; 8, p. 37] or general student motivation and adaptation strategies [1, p. 68–72; 3, p. 230–233; 4, p. 3493]. Thus, the question of how structured research supervision in club settings contributes to first-year students' psychological, academic, and communicative development remains insufficiently addressed. In particular, there is a lack of empirical work describing how supervisors scaffold research experiences step-by-step or how club formats differ in supporting identity formation as researchers. Achieving the right balance between support and autonomy is a delicate but essential aspect of effective research mentoring. Students need time and space to experiment, struggle, and learn from setbacks, but they also need reassurance and constructive input as they develop their identity as researchers. Experiential learning theories argue that deep learning occurs through cycles of action and reflection [6; 15]. When students are just starting out, they usually rely on a clear structure to make sense of unfamiliar academic tasks. Regular meetings, straightforward instructions, and the chance to ask questions, either with a supervisor or among peers, give them the support they often need in the beginning. With time, as they gain experience, their confidence grows. When students start working more independently, the nature of supervision changes. Supervisors give less directions and thoughtful conversations are conducted more often. So, as students grow more confident, the supervisor’s role shifts from directing tasks to fostering reflection. Instead of guiding every step, the supervisor supports the student’s own decision-making by asking questions, offering perspective, and

encouraging independent thinking. At this stage, students begin to take more initiative: they define their research focus, set priorities, and track their own progress. Maintaining open communication throughout this process allows supervision to remain responsive and tailored. When done well, this approach not only improves learning but also helps students take real ownership of their work.

All of this has practical value for those who supervise scientific clubs for first-year students. These clubs should offer a friendly and supportive environment that respects the needs of beginners. When students feel safe, motivated, and well-guided, they are more likely to grow as researchers. A well-organized club can help them gain skills, confidence, and a clearer sense of who they are as learners.

Methodology. The methodology of this article is based on reflective practice and qualitative analysis of supervisory experience with first-year students at Borys Grinchenko Metropolitan University. The focus is on two scientific clubs at the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology. Data were gathered by observing how students participated in club activities, reviewing their research tasks and presentations, and also students' engaging in regular discussions during meetings. The focus was on how their research skills developed over time, how they became more independent in managing their work, and how they sustained motivation throughout the academic year.The insights gained were interpreted within the educational and developmental psychology framework to evaluate the effectiveness of scientific clubs as a supportive environment for novice researchers.

Results and Discussion. Scientific Club Activities as a Platform for Freshers' Research Development At Borys Grinchenko Metropolitan University, the development of students' research competence is an essential component of their academic formation, starting from the first year of study. Participation in scientific clubs is one of the key forms of integrating students into the research environment. The clubs offer first-year students a chance to explore subject-specific questions, strengthen

core academic skills, and gradually gain confidence as beginning researchers, all with the support of experienced supervisors.

At the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology, several scientific clubs operate to foster students' research engagement and enhance their academic development from the first year of study. In this article, we share the experience of two clubs: «*Crossroads of Cultures: From Language to Meaning*» and «*Linguistic Labyrinths: Exploring Phonetics*». Each of these clubs provides first-year students with structured and supervised opportunities to explore relevant areas of English philology while gradually developing critical thinking and independent research skills.

The scientific club «*Crossroads of Cultures: From Language to Meaning*» is focused on the study of language and culture intersections in Anglophone literary texts. Students examine issues such as identity, intercultural communication, and style through their engagement with a range of literary texts. In group discussions and text analyses, as well as in their presentations, they consider how language reflects cultural meanings and influences how texts are understood by readers.This approach encourages learners to examine literary discourse through the lens of sociocultural linguistics and discourse analysis, thereby enhancing their understanding of language as a vehicle of culture.

The club «*Linguistic Labyrinths: Exploring Phonetics*» offers students a practice-oriented introduction to English phonetics. Its activities include analysis of English speech sounds focusing on stress and intonation patterns, using dialogues and recordings of native speakers. Students also compare British and American accents, becoming familiar with segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation features. Additionally, they are introduced to the basics of acoustic analysis and phonetic software tools, which they use to investigate various phonological phenomena. Across both clubs, students are involved in research-based tasks, roundtable discussions, conference participation, and publication of research findings, all within a supportive and collaborative learning environment.

Phases of Student Research Development. The work of the scientific clubs is structured in progressive stages to support the gradual development of research skills in first-year students. At the initial stage, students are introduced to the format and aims of the club and offered guidance on how to approach research at a basic level. This phase is focused on orientation and motivation, where students explore the topics of the club and choose individual or group directions for further study. In both clubs, supervisors help students formulate research questions and clarify their interests, whether in phonetics or intercultural literary analysis.

As students become more confident, they begin working on small-scale research tasks. The phonetics club includes identifying and analyzing phonetic features such as stress and intonation in authentic audio materials, comparing British and American pronunciation, and experimenting with software tools for acoustic analysis. In the literature-focused club, students work with literary texts, examining how identity and cultural intersections are expressed linguistically and contextually. Tasks at this stage require the application of basic analytical methods and the gradual development of academic vocabulary.

In the third stage, students prepare research presentations based on their findings. These may take the form of slideshows, posters, short papers, or multimedia formats, depending on the nature of the topic. Club members are encouraged to participate in round-table discussions, faculty conferences, and even submit their work for publication. At this point, students begin to face challenges they may not have encountered before – balancing their workload, understanding academic expectations, and learning how to express their ideas clearly in front of others. With guidance from supervisors and encouragement from peers, they start to work through these difficulties, often gaining practical strategies along the way. As they work through these steps, students gradually gain confidence and begin to develop a more solid understanding of what research involves in their discipline.

Reflections on Supervising First-Year Students. One of the first and most persistent challenges we, as supervisors, face when engaging first-year students in research activities is their initial lack of motivation and hesitation. Many students come from school environments where research was limited to summarizing information or writing standard essays, and few have been encouraged to ask critical questions or explore unfamiliar topics independently. When they arrive at university, they often feel overwhelmed by the idea of academic inquiry. This hesitation is compounded by the fact that they are new not only to the format and expectations of higher education but also to one another. At the beginning of their studies, students are unfamiliar with their peers, which makes them reluctant to collaborate or share ideas openly. Building trust and community in the research clubs takes time and careful facilitation. As supervisors, we have found that some tasks help break the ice, and these tasks include assigning early tasks that require teamwork, such as brainstorming sessions, group presentations, or shared reading logs. These activities allow students to gradually discover their common interests and develop the confidence to collaborate on more complex research projects.

A second major hurdle is teaching students how to approach research responsibly and adequately. Most first-year students are not trained to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources, especially when so much information is available online. It is not uncommon for students to rely on general websites, social media posts, or outdated references simply because they do not yet understand how academic credibility is established. We devote a significant portion of early training to helping students learn how to find, evaluate, and use reliable sources. For this purpose, workshops and practical exercises on search strategies, understanding peer-reviewed journals, and comparing primary and secondary sources have been organized and conducted. The issues of plagiarism and proper citation need to be addressed as well. Many students do not plagiarize intentionally; they do not understand the rules or how to integrate and attribute sources correctly. As supervisors, we treat these early mistakes as learning

opportunities. Students gradually build their competence and confidence in scholarly work through targeted sessions on citation styles, paraphrasing, and academic integrity.

Another critical challenge is helping students manage their self-doubt and fear of failure. Many feel ashamed or embarrassed when they do not understand something or struggle with new tasks. As teachers, we must reassure them that confusion is a natural and necessary part of learning. We repeatedly emphasize that research is not about having all the answers but about learning to ask meaningful questions and persist through uncertainty. To create a rapport, we actively encourage questions, provide regular check-ins, and allow students to discuss their difficulties. At the same time, we help them develop practical skills to overcome these challenges. Public speaking, for instance, is a common fear among first-year students, yet it is central to presenting research. Many students worry about their accents, vocabulary, or how the audience will react to their presentations. We address this by organizing low-stakes opportunities to speak in front of others, starting with informal club presentations, peer feedback sessions, and eventually short public talks. With each new opportunity, students become more comfortable expressing their ideas.

It is essential to teach students how to get engaged in academic discussion and debate, which is another priority that often comes with difficulties. Many first-year students do not yet feel confident enough to challenge one another’s opinions or defend their ideas. Some hesitate to speak up for fear of saying something wrong or offending others. Students are taught that disagreement is not disrespectful but an essential element of academic engagement through moderated discussions. As they become more confident, we introduce structured formats for debate and argumentation, which guide them in organising their ideas clearly, supporting their points with evidence, and responding effectively under pressure. These activities help to strengthen students’ critical thinking and oral communication, another aspect the importance of which is emphasised is outlining the importance of clarity, reasoning, and respect in academic settings.

Finally, a significant milestone in our work with students is their preparation for and participation in the student research conference. By the end of their first year, students are invited to present the results of their projects – often their first real academic work–to a broader audience. The preparation process is demanding: they must write a paper, format it according to educational standards, prepare a visual presentation, and rehearse a speech. For many, this is the first time they are asked to present their ideas publicly and formally. As supervisors, we provide support at each stage: selecting research topics, refining arguments, structuring written work, and preparing oral presentations. To assist students in developing presentation skills, we organize mock sessions that replicate the format of an academic conference. These sessions with well-designed activities help students become more confident in acquiring skills to present their ideas and improve their communication ability in a formal setting. The participation in workshops, round tables, and conferences serves as an opportunity for students to demonstrate their progress over the year.

Conclusions. Scientific clubs for first-year students at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University serve as a valuable introduction to academic life. They allow students to connect theory with practice through discussions, group work, and hands-on tasks. This early engagement helps students understand the basics of research and grow more confident in sharing their ideas.

These clubs also ease the transition to university. Many students begin with uncertainty, but regular support and peer collaboration help them gradually take initiative and feel more at home in academic settings. *Crossroads of Cultures: From Language to Meaning* and *Linguistic Labyrinths: Exploring Phonetics* offer supportive environments where students explore topics of interest and develop their thinking.

Participation in conferences, publications, and academic discussions deepens this engagement. Such experiences build practical skills and help students see themselves as part of the academic community. Over time, they begin to speak with greater confidence, clarity, and curiosity.

Motivation increases when students learn together, reflect on their progress, and receive meaningful feedback. Supervisors play a key role by offering both structure and encouragement. Activities like public speaking, collaborative projects, and guided research tasks not only strengthen academic abilities but also prepare students for future challenges in academic and professional contexts.

Limitations. A limitation of this work is that it focuses on the experience of two scientific clubs within a specific faculty and does not include a systematic evaluation of students' long-term progress or a comparative analysis with similar initiatives in other institutions. Future research might benefit from quantitative and qualitative studies assessing the impact of club participation on students' academic achievement, motivation, and skills development.

Future Perspectives. Future research could explore how different formats and models of student-led research activities influence academic engagement across various disciplines.

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