

Report on Bachelor / Master Thesis

Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Student:	Adam Bruzi
Advisor:	Barbara Pertold-Gebicka
Title of the thesis:	The Impact of COVID-19 on Students' Academic Performance: The Case of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

OVERALL ASSESSMENT (provided in English, Czech, or Slovak):

Short summary

In his bachelor thesis Adam Bruzi investigates whether covid-19 pandemics and the related restrictions had any effect on academic performance of university students. As the working example he uses students of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSV) at Charles University. Adam hypothesizes that pandemics could have affected students through different channels. Sudden switch to on-line education could deteriorate the quality of teaching, students could find it harder to concentrate and motivate themselves to study. On the other hand, students had more time for studying, as extracurricular activities were strongly restricted as well as teachers could potentially devote more time to prepare studying materials. In the empirical part of the thesis Adam turns to microdata provided by the Study Department of the FSV. The data cover all students who entered a bachelor or master program at FSV between the Fall of 2016 and the Fall of 2019 and report their study results in each semester till Spring 2021. Econometric analysis reveals that during covid semesters (i.e. Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021) students had significantly better grades than in the preceding semesters. This holds even when controlling for semester (Spring vs. Fall) and student fixed effects. On the other hand, the probability of graduating on time has significantly decreased in the times of covid for both bachelor and master students (more so for bachelor students). This suggests that students have experienced study difficulties because of covid. These are not observed in form of grades, probably because of grade inflation and easier exams, but are revealed in the preparedness of students to produce the final thesis. Most affected students are the youngest ones, who have lived through the pandemics through the majority of their university life.

Contribution

This thesis presents a very important analysis of the effects of covid on university students. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first attempt to quantify such effects in the Czech context. While there are some analyses of the effects of school closures on Czech pupils, university students have been 'untouched'. Similarly, there are just a few papers worldwide devoted to the effect of covid on university (or college) students. Adam cites them all in his thesis.

Findings of this thesis have important policy implications. They reveal that covid-19 pandemics was not neutral to students of FSV and that it has affected their study outcomes. Most importantly, it shows that students affected by the pandemics, especially those who lived most of their study lives during pandemic times, i.e. bachelor students, find it more difficult to complete their study obligations on time.

Methods

Adam had at his disposal individual-students' data (anonymized) derived from the Study Information System. He observes each student's grades for all semesters during which he/she was an active student. This means that the data have a panel structure. Adam correctly applies panel data methods when analyzing the effects of covid on students' grades. He experiments with fixed effects, random effects and first-differencing to arrive at the conclusion that first differencing leads to the most reliable estimation. Argumentation behind the choice of the preferred model is correct, however Adam forgets that interpretation of results differs between fixed-effects and first-differenced models, especially when dummy explanatory variables are used. This is best visible in Tables 10 and 11 where for some institutes we see huge differences between FE and FD estimates. This is because at some institutes average grades went back to the long-term average in the academic year of 2020/2021. Nevertheless, I consider the methods applied by Adam as appropriate.

For the purpose of investigating the effect of covid on the probability of graduating on time, Adam uses cross-sectional data, because on-time graduation can happen only once during study course. Given that the dependent variable – an indicator whether a student has graduated on time – is binary Adam

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experiments with linear probability models and a logit model. He correctly reports marginal effects estimated by both approaches and shows that the results are insensitive to the choice of estimation method.

Literature

The literature review consists of two parts. First, Adam presents several papers written in the pre-covid era that compare the performance of university students in on-line vs. presence courses. Review of this literature helps build a prior for how a sudden switch towards on-line education due to the covid-19 pandemic could have affected students. Next, Adam reviews several recent studies analyzing the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on students' academic performance expressed in terms of GPA and in terms of graduation timing. The presented review is exhaustive. It helps the author build his own research and helps him interpret the results.

Manuscript form

The thesis by Adam Bruzl reads well. It is logically organized and chapters of the thesis are nicely interconnected. All figures and tables are self-explanatory.

Overall evaluation and suggested questions for the discussion during the defense

Overall, this is a very good bachelor thesis. Adam took on a challenging topic, he had to follow the literature that was still evolving while he was working on the thesis. He was a very conscious writer thinking about each step of his work. The resulting thesis is of high quality and high relevance. I recommend it for the defense and suggest a grade A.

The results of the Urkund analysis do not indicate significant text similarity with other available sources.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Contribution</i> (max. 30 points)	30
<i>Methods</i> (max. 30 points)	28
<i>Literature</i> (max. 20 points)	18
<i>Manuscript Form</i> (max. 20 points)	18
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	94
GRADE (A – B – C – D – E – F)	A

NAME OF THE REFEREE: Barbara Pertold-Gebicka

DATE OF EVALUATION: 19.5.2022

*digitally signed on 19.5.2022
by Barbara Pertold-Gebicka*

Referee Signature

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EXPLANATION OF CATEGORIES AND SCALE:

CONTRIBUTION: *The author presents original ideas on the topic demonstrating critical thinking and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and empirics. There is a distinct value added of the thesis.*

METHODS: *The tools used are relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the author's level of studies. The thesis topic is comprehensively analyzed.*

LITERATURE REVIEW: *The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and command of recent literature. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way.*

MANUSCRIPT FORM: *The thesis is well structured. The student uses appropriate language and style, including academic format for graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables and disposes with a complete bibliography.*

Overall grading:

TOTAL	GRADE
91 – 100	A
81 - 90	B
71 - 80	C
61 – 70	D
51 – 60	E
0 – 50	F