



## MASTER THESIS ASSESSMENT REPORT

**Assessment type:** Master thesis review

**Author of thesis:** Arailym Otemurat

**Title of thesis:** The outbound mobility of higher education students from Kazakhstan

**Author of assessment:** Mgr. Jan Kohoutek, PhD.

The thesis deals with internationalization of higher education (HE) in Kazakhstan, which is a pertinent theme falling into the public policy field. In particular, the thesis focuses on identifying and examining the reasons limiting mobilities of Kazakh HE students to westward countries (meant EU countries, namely in Western and Central Europe). To this end, the thesis makes use of a mixed methodology in which the qualitative part is prevalent; actually the quantitative statistical approach is applied somewhat formally (see “Sociological Survey” part, p. 41, as with  $n = 35$ , most of the calculi could be done by simple computation, not really needing statistical software). Also, there is no information on the socio-economic background of the survey respondents and how the survey was carried out. Still, the author should be commended for the qualitative part containing document/literature review and 11 online interviews with Kazakh students (studying nationwide and in EU). The Covid pandemics contributed to the lack of willingness of other types of respondents to share their views and be interviewed (namely HE Kazakh staff and authorities).

Conceptually, the argumentation is underpinned by insights from historical institutionalism and by making use of international/globalization rationales. The concepts are of relevance and historical institutionalism helps shed light on the regional disparities. However, in particular, the application of internationalization rationales, which gives a good ground for theory-driven discussion of setbacks and barriers of WE, outbound mobilities of Kazakh students, is not taken up any further beyond description and thus not applied in framing and analysis of the resulting findings (e.g. language and cultural issues as identified through the interviews and other literature). Empirically, the thesis does a good job in its main goal, i.e. identification of the barriers to the westbound HE student mobilities, as well as, in setting the identified barriers in wider socio-cultural-religious context of the country. This is helped by the use of secondary data mostly where applicable, which is another plus point.

Still, some of the resulting argumentation lacks depth (also possibly because of the missing *country-wide* statistical data). This is relatable to e.g. the causes of suicide among the youth or a stay-at-home family mentality (in south and western part of Kazakhstan), limiting particularly young HE-educated females’ life options to early marriage. The very point of some females from traditional families getting HE educated (purely) for more extensive bridewealth (qalyn-mal) is intriguing; however, it is not clear to what extent this practice has been applied empirically and is tenable socio-economically, particularly in view of comparatively higher numbers of females getting HE education (so that their being kept at home for another 40+ years of life would incur significant losses and deprivations, also in economic sense, privately but also collectively) – in this respect, the inclusion of the more detailed labour statistics (by sex, age and education attained) would be of significant help. *Does such statistics exist in Kazakhstan?*



Although the thesis is well written, there are some issues with its structure as well as language. Structurally, the research questions and goals should follow rather than precede the wider contextualization of the research problem chosen. Second and more problematically, the conceptual underpinnings (p. 49, part III) are given only after the empirical research part, which makes their links and bearings on the formulation of the research goals and questions more difficult to understand and follow than it should be (the wording of the goals and questions is ok). Linguistically, there are few missing prepositions and grammar issues (in my view, wrong usage of the word “cease” throughout); the helpful list of abbreviations is not quite complete (“GPA” not explained).

Finally, I have some reservations about the recommended measures set before the very conclusion. They, more often than not, center on the state (“etatism”) as the actor to ameliorate the issues, without accounting for the fact that it has been the state entities that are, to a large extent, responsible for the problems’ existence (corruption, clientelism, centralization ...) In this respect, the considerations of potential of a namely non-profit sector would be needy and welcome.

Overall, the thesis is a very good contribution to the still limited research literature on higher education in post-Soviet countries.

**From the above stated reasons, I recommend the thesis for defence and to be assessed by grade “C”.**

Date: 28 August 2020

Signature: *Jan Kohoutek*.....