

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Title of the thesis:	Strategy of Slovak Republic's government to use higher education as an investment in human capital
Author of the thesis:	Bc. Erika Smereková
Referee (incl. titles):	Mgr. Magdalena Mouralová

Remark: It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 500 words long. In case you will assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.

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

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20)</i>	10
<i>Contribution (max. 20)</i>	12
<i>Methods (max. 20)</i>	10
<i>Literature (max. 20)</i>	12
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20)</i>	17
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100)	61
The proposed grade (1-2-3-4)	2

You can even use a decimal point (e.g. giving the grade of 2.5 for 60 points).

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Theoretical background:

In the focus of the diploma thesis there is an idea of higher education as investment to human capital. It is examined by an analysis of Slovak higher education policy documents.

The thesis is theoretically based mainly on human capital theory, which is supplemented by concept of welfare regimes. I appreciate multidisciplinary approach, but the choice of theories and concepts is not explained in satisfactory way and the theories are not enough connected. Therefore, the theoretical background seems to be quite random (for example including of Liessman is not clear – there are more academic resources criticizing the state of higher education from the more evidence based positions).

Unfortunately, I notice more weakness of theoretical chapter:

- Theories are presented in the form of literature review, but they are not related to the rest of thesis in the satisfactory way (it is especially the case of Esping-Andersen's typology of welfare regimes which is related neither to goals and methodology nor to analysis and results).
- The role of theories in the paper is not explained, I am not sure why student has chosen just these approaches and these authors (Esping-Andersen's typology, Liessman's text). Theories are not directly connected to the research questions and hypotheses.
- On the other hand there are some other approaches which could help with framing of analysis and results – for example different opinions on function and role of higher education or typology of policy documents and its function.
- Literature review is rather poor; more resources should be used both for topic of human capital (four resources) and welfare regimes (three resources). I miss discussion of critique of (almost 30-years-old) Esping-Andersen's typology and specificity of post communistic regimes (study of Beblavy, Thum and Veselková is relevant, but there are much more relevant resources which are ignored by author).
- There are some minor inaccuracies:

- informal education takes place not only at home, but anywhere (internet, TV, literature, museums, schoolmates and friends...);
- besides formal and informal there is also nonformal education (in form of voluntary courses, hobby education and so on) as a part of lifelong education;
- tertiary education would be a more accurate term than higher education.

2) Contribution:

The paper tries to “contribute to qualitative literature about human capital of SR and strategy of higher education policy. Results will contribute to the debate about the quality of higher education in the SR and its cooperation with the economy of the country. Moreover, the analysis will also contribute to qualitative literature about the relationship between educational policy as part of the welfare state and human capital of the country.” (p. 4)

I appreciate the courage of author step out of her discipline both theoretically and methodologically. Unfortunately, both aspects are not very strong because of it (however I am aware that my own disciplinary background differs from the author’s one, so it is quite unfair to the author).

Nevertheless, from my point of view, the results are not very surprising and do not broaden the knowledge about tertiary education in the Central Europe significantly.

Some problems of the system are identified in the paper, but I miss the next step – either an explanation of roots or a suggestion of solution.

3) Methods:

A presentation of methods is rather short. In fact, only type of analyzed data are introduced (documents and experts’ opinions), but neither the way of their choice, nor the way of analysis are described. I miss also discussion of limits of the selected methodical approach.

The methodological background is not clear as the concepts rooted in really different philosophical approaches are mentioned or used (discursive analysis vs. formulating hypotheses).

Hypotheses should be based on theories, but this connection is not clear. Moreover, the key concepts are not operationalized as there is no clear transfer from the theory to the analysis.

Therefore, it is not clear how the validity of hypotheses is evaluated. It influences also the results presentation (p. 56), where I miss the clear explanation why just these aspects are included.

The structure of analytical chapter is not very clear, as there is used several points of view (time, type of document, level of policy, goal) for subchapters. The analysis is rather review of documents as no analytical units are defined.

4) Literature:

The paper is based on scientific resources but the sample is rather poor. There are many secondary quotations. Some arguments are not supported by any resource, even though these are not common knowledge.

5) Manuscript form:

Manuscript form is adequate, I have only minor remarks:

- tables should have names covering their content;
- an abbreviation “SR” is used without definition;
- there are some gender incorrectness (f. e. “his” as general – p. 10);
- some typographic details (better to align block, not indent first line under headline);
- different lists of aspects in the tables 5 and 6;
- Is there so strong input evidence to use 4 significant figures (table 2)?

DATE OF EVALUATION:

18. 6. 2016



Magdalena Muralová