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Review of the doctoral dissertation of Svitlana Didkivska

entitled ”An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives“

written under the supervision of Dr. hab. Grażyna Paliwoda-Pękosz, prof. at Krakow University of Economics, Poland

The review is based on the decision of the Council for Academic Discipline of Management and Quality Sciences of the Krakow University of Economics from 11 July 2024, which approved me as a reviewer of the doctoral dissertation of Ms. **Svitlana Didkivska**.

The doctoral dissertation entitled **”An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives“** was prepared under the scientific supervision of Dr. hab. Grażyna Paliwoda-Pękosz, prof. at the Krakow University of Economics, Poland.

1. GENERAL REMARKS

The doctoral dissertation written by Svitlana Didkivska, entitled "An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives“ under scientific supervision of Dr. hab. Grażyna Paliwoda-Pękosz should be accepted and sent in the further procedure because it has adequate structure, appropriate set of goal, research questions and hypotheses, valid methodological approach as well as significant novelty and scientific contribution.

The PhD thesis titled "**An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives**” provided comparison of the up-to-date factors that determine the quality of distance learning systems in Poland and Ukraine comparing and contrasting the educational systems, cultural contexts, and technological infrastructures in Poland and Ukraine as well as analyzing unique challenges and opportunities such as identification and analysis of stakeholders and creation of a framework of shaping the quality of distance education.

While many studies may analyze the implementation of distance learning, focusing specifically on how it enhances educational services provided a fresh angle. Presented results contributed to the original perspectives to the existing literature on distance learning.

The detailed evaluation of the doctoral dissertation is prepared taking into account following five criteria:

- Topic and general structure of dissertation;
- Research methodology (assumptions, objectives, hypotheses, methods);
- Literature;
- Detailed assessment of the content;
- Language and editing.

2. DETAILED REMARKS

2.1 Topic and general structure of dissertation

The title "An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives" is clear and informative. Distance learning is a timely and relevant topic, especially given the global shift towards online education in recent years. Providing insights in both Polish and Ukrainian perspectives, presented comparative study, could be compelling for understanding different contexts as well as providing the valuable conclusions and contributions for other regions, researchers and practitioners.

The doctoral dissertation has 164 pages and it is organized in 8 chapters (introduction, 6 working chapters and conclusion) besides the work contains List of acronyms at the beginning of the work, and at the end the following: References, List of tables, List of figures and Annex (containing 5 questionnaires). Work contains 43 tables, 4 figures and 278 references.

The complete work is structured in 8 chapters: introduction, 6 chapters and conclusion. The PhD thesis is well structured. The introduction presented background, motivation for research, problem research goals and research questions. PhD thesis also covered the following chapters: Chapter 1. Overview of educational services; Chapter 2. Introduction to distance learning; Chapter 3. Quality of educational services; Chapter 4. Research methodology; Chapter 5. Results and analysis; Chapter 6, Framework for shaping the quality of distance learning.

Finally, Conclusion presented summarized chapters, theoretical implication, limitations of the work as well as directions of the future work (which is very important part).

2.2 Research methodology (assumptions, objectives, hypotheses, methods)

In the introduction section the author stated the problem as well as research background. Also the author stated the following research objective "The aim of the research is to identify the determinants shaping the quality of educational services provided by universities using distance learning from the viewpoint of different stakeholders, in order to create recommendations for the enhancement of educational services."

It could be stated that the aim of research is comprehensive and multifaceted, focusing on understanding and improving the quality of educational services in the context of distance learning at universities. Author aimed to identify determinants important for quality in distance learning environment based on view point of different stake holders and finally to create recommendations. In summary, the goal of the research is to thoroughly investigate the factors that influence the quality of distance learning at universities from multiple stakeholder perspectives and to use this information to develop practical recommendations for service enhancement. The goal is appropriate for PhD thesis ensuring the research novelty as well as practical and theoretical contributions.

Author stated 4 research goals:

G1: *Identification of the state of the art approaches to the quality of educational services and the quality of distance learning.*

G2: *Identification of stakeholders and their characteristics in university educational services in Poland and Ukraine.*

G3: *Identification and comparison of the up-to-date factors that determine the quality of distance learning in higher education from the point of view of different stakeholders at Krakow University of Economics (KUE) and Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University.*

G4: *Creation of a framework of shaping the quality of distance education that takes into account Polish and Ukrainian perspectives.*

The first two goals are directed to the analysis of the state of art research in this field as well as systematization of literature, analysis of existing achievement and selection of research directions, stakeholders and educational services.

The third and fourth goals are research oriented, covering comparative analysis (goal 3) as well as creation of the framework. The fourth goal of this research is to develop a comprehensive framework for shaping the quality of distance education, integrating insights from both Polish and Ukrainian contexts, and providing practical recommendations for implementation. This research goal is the most important one and has the potential to significantly improve the effectiveness and quality of distance education in these countries and beyond.

Research goals will be achieved by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: *What are the state-of-the-art approaches towards assuring the quality of educational services and the quality of distance learning?*

RQ2: *Who are the main stakeholders of university educational services in Poland and Ukraine, and what are their profiles/characteristics?*

RQ3: *How can the quality of distance learning be captured from the point of view of various stakeholders?*

The research questions are in the line with research goals. Author could introduce also one more research question connected to the development of the framework.

All research questions have clear scope and relevance. They are properly specified and number of research methods are available.

The research questions are well-aligned with the overall aim of developing a framework for shaping the quality of distance education, incorporating Polish and Ukrainian perspectives. They provide a clear and structured approach to gather the necessary information and insights for achieving the research goal.

The title of PhD thesis, as well as aim, research goals and research questions are well defined and formulated ensuring that thesis will deliver necessary scientific contributions and theoretical and practical results.

2.3 Literature

Author presented 278 references in the Reference list. Totally 17 references are in the Ukrainian language and all other (261) are in English. The most of them are from the relevant Journals that are indexed in SCOPUS or Clarivate. The most of them are references published in last 10 years. It could be concluded that author provided comprehensive analysis of contemporary literature. Little remark: all references listed in the reference list does not fully follow reference style.

Author **Svitlana Didkivska** presented 5 manuscripts in the Reference list where she is the first author (one manuscript from 2020, three from 2021 and one from 2023), also she presented two manuscripts where she is co-authors (second 2022, and third 2023). All seven manuscripts are in the scope of the PhD thesis demonstrating the previous research as well as experience and contribution of the author in this scientific field.

All presented literature sources are complete and all of them are mentioned in the text.

Author provided literature review and focusing on specific, under-explored aspects of distance learning in the context of Poland and Ukraine author provided original and unique scientific results and contributions.

2.4 Detailed assessment of the content

In the terms of content and organization of the material dissertation receives a positive assessment with minor drawbacks that will be listed in the text below.

The first section is **Introduction**.

This section is focused on definition of the background of the research, definition of the problem and rationale why author aimed to address defined issues. Also, Introduction stated the aim, goals and research questions. Finally the structure of the thesis was presented. This structure could be provided in more detail as well as research methods and potential contributions.

The first chapter "**Overview of educational services**", covers: Historical perspective of educational services, Types of educational services and Stakeholders of university educational services.

This chapter traces the origins of education from historical perspectives. It highlights the continuous evolution of educational methods and goals, shaped by cultural, technological, and socio-political changes. The chapter also categorizes the diverse stakeholders in university education into internal and external groups, detailing their varying influences and interests, especially concerning distance learning.

This chapter is mainly theoretical one. There is a small remark: Part of the section Historical perspective of educational services, could be avoided. There is no need to far back in the history. The history of distance learning would be more useful to address:

Section 2 "**Introduction to distance learning**" covers: Evolution of distance learning and Electronic distance learning as the current stage of distance learning.

This chapter analyzes the evolution, types, and significance of distance learning, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Distance learning, which allows knowledge acquisition without traditional classrooms, has advanced greatly with information and communication technologies. The chapter outlines the advantages (flexibility, time-saving, cost efficiency) and disadvantages (technical difficulties, lack of personal motivation, financial inequalities) of distance learning as mentioned in the literature. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of this education mode, prompting a rapid shift to online platforms. Additionally, the chapter compares global approaches to distance learning, noting specific trends and tools in the USA, UK, Poland, and Ukraine, and their impacts on students' experiences and satisfaction.

Section 3 "**Quality of educational services**"covers: The concept of quality; Approaches to the quality of educational services and To-date approaches to the quality of educational services with the use of distance learning.

This chapter explores the concept of educational quality, emphasizing its importance in the modern market economy and its impact on the competitiveness and sustainability of educational institutions. It traces the historical evolution of quality from ancient standardization practices to contemporary quality management systems like ISO standards. Various definitions and approaches to educational quality are examined. For example, in Europe, quality assurance is guided by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, encompassing internal and external quality assurance and agency standards. The chapter also addresses the quality of distance learning, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Quality parameters for distance learning are identified through a literature review, incorporating elements of a systematic review. Additionally, the chapter discusses the specific challenges and strategies related to distance learning quality in Polish and Ukrainian contexts, reflecting on empirical studies and the integration of innovative methods and technologies to enhance educational outcomes.

Section 4 "**Research methodology**" covers: Settings of the study; Research methods and Research procedure

This chapter outlines the research design and methods, focusing on comparative case studies at KUE and ZP. It describes the settings of both universities, emphasizing their structures, programs, and international collaborations. Comparative case studies and thematic analysis are central to the methodology. Data collection includes document analysis, in-depth interviews with stakeholders, and both traditional and systematic literature reviews to explore the quality of distance learning. The chapter details sampling techniques, data collection processes, and adaptations due to challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.The research aims to provide new insights into distance learning in Poland and Ukraine, define quality from multiple perspectives, and develop a framework for enhancing distance learning quality. It seeks to improve educational services, tailor learning to local conditions, and optimize resources and technologies at KUE and ZP.

Section 5 "**Results and analysis**" covers: Document analysis; Academic Staff; Students; E-Learning Departments; IT-Departments; Employers and Discussion of results.

This chapter provides a detailed examination of findings from comparative case studies at KUE and ZP, focusing on various perspectives on distance learning. It includes an analysis of Ukrainian and Polish regulations and crisis responses, assessing their impact on both institutions. Different stakeholders were analyzed and their answers were taken into account. Insights from academic staff reveal their views on quality, challenges, unethical behavior, future expectations, and stakeholder roles. Students offer feedback on quality, unethical behavior, and key stakeholders. The E-Learning Department discusses the overall conduct of distance learning, quality determinants, lecturer challenges, and future predictions. The IT Department shares opinions on challenges, new solutions, and potential improvements, while employers provide feedback on graduates, the effectiveness of distance learning for employee training, and future potential. The chapter concludes by synthesizing data from all stakeholders, identifying common themes, and discussing the results in relation to existing literature and their implications for policy and practice.

Section 6 "**Framework for shaping the quality of distance learning**" covers: Framework proposition and Discussion of possible framework applications.

This chapter introduces a framework for improving distance learning quality at universities, informed by literature, regulations, and stakeholder feedback. The framework assigns quality parameters to stakeholders and suggests methods for continuous improvement. It covers technical aspects like telecommunications and data protection, methodological elements such as cognitive load and curriculum relevance, and organizational factors including feedback mechanisms and scheduling. The framework emphasizes continuous feedback and monitoring through various methods like system performance reviews and user surveys. It is designed to be adaptable to university-specific conditions, aiming to enhance distance learning through evaluation, planning, stakeholder engagement, and responsiveness to evolving needs.

Finally the chapter **Conclusion**, provides results, practical and theoretical contributions, limitations of the research as well as directions of future research. In this chapter author could readdress aim, goals and research questions and explicit make answer on the raised research questions.

The PhD thesis **"An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives"** has well organized structure. The delivered content justify PhD thesis according the selection of the chapters, content and all other elements.

The PhD thesis thorough examination of quality assurance methods and stakeholder feedback offers a comprehensive view of distance learning's challenges and opportunities. The proposed framework for improving distance learning quality is practical and adaptable, emphasizing continuous evaluation and responsiveness to institutional needs.

Overall, the PhD thesis **"An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives"** offers valuable insights and practical recommendations for enhancing distance education, with a well-structured approach that bridges theory and practice.

2.5 Language and editing

Overall, the quality of written language and editing is satisfactory. The thesis is written in a clear and precise academic style, appropriate for the subject matter and audience. The language used is formal and scholarly, effectively conveying complex ideas and research findings.

It is obvious that author is not a native speaker, and minor language issues do not significantly influence readability of the PhD thesis. Used terminology is correct and appropriate to the specific scientific field and discipline. On the other hand the complete text could be improved by proof reading by native speaker.

The PhD thesis is well-organized, with a clear and logical structure that guides the reader through the research process, from the introduction and literature review to the methodology, findings, and conclusion. Each section is appropriately titled and segmented, enabling easy navigation.

The use of tables, figures, and appendices is well-integrated, providing visual support to the textual content and enhancing the overall presentation.

Also there are some minor issues concerning the editing, some free, blank spaces could be avoided (page 19, before and after the Figure 1, page 117 The section should not be ended with table or figure, pages 44, 48, 118. Table title should be on the same page as table, pages 92 and 93. Title on the Table 2 shows connections between stages of information revolution previously described and their influence to distance learning. Should be Table 2 Connections between stages of information revolution previously described and their influence to distance learning.

The language and editing of this PhD thesis **"An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives"** are on appropriate level, contributing significantly to the effective communication of the research findings and arguments.

In conclusion, the PhD thesis "An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives" presents a comprehensive and insightful exploration into the transformative impact of distance learning on higher education. By detailed examination both Polish and Ukrainian educational systems, the author not only highlights the unique challenges and opportunities faced by each country but also offers valuable comparative insights that are broadly applicable. The findings underscore the potential of distance learning to significantly enhance educational accessibility, flexibility, and quality. Based on all factors, the PhD thesis

"An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives"
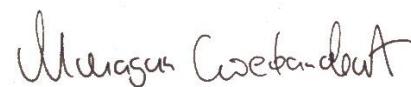
written by Svitlana Didkivska

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is original and provides new insights, uses unique data, and employs innovative methodologies as well as meet all legal and formal requirements for PhD thesis. **I am glad and honored to recommend to the Council for Academic Discipline of Management and Quality Science of the Krakow University of Economics the admission of the PhD candidate to public defense of this dissertation.**

08.08.2024.

In Kragujevac

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