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Review of the PhD dissertation
of Svitlana Didkivska, in Development Research

Title: *An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives*

Scientific supervisor: prof. dr hab. Grażyna Paliwoda-Pękosz
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Formal grounds for the review: resolution of the of the Council for Academic Discipline of Management and Quality Sciences of the Krakow University of Economics from 11 July 2024.

Purpose of PhD dissertation review: assessment of compliance with the requirements specified in the “Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce z dnia 20.07.2018 (Dz. U. z 2018 r., poz. 1668 z późn. zm.)” Act, and position on allowing Svitlana Didkivska to the public defense of a PhD thesis.

I. Characteristics of the PhD dissertation

The PhD dissertation of Svitlana Didkivska was initiated in the field of science: management and quality sciences, the scientific discipline: management. Svitlana Didkivska has written her PhD dissertation 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, prof. at the Krakow University of Economics, Poland.

The PhD dissertation has 164 pages and consists of an introduction, 6 chapters, conclusions, acknowledgement, a list of references, a list of tables, a list of figures, and 5 annexes.

The structure of the dissertation is detailed (reaches to the three-digit level) and, in addition to the text, contains tables and figures.

The introduction has identified the main research gap justifying the research, the results of which are presented in the PhD dissertation. The main purpose of the research, 4 detailed goals, and 3 research questions have been also formulated.

Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive examination of the evolution and variety of educational services. Additionally, the chapter discusses the diverse stakeholders involved in university education, categorizing them into internal and external groups, with varying degrees of influence and interest, particularly in the context of distance learning.

Chapter 2 analyzes the evolution, types, and significance of distance learning. The chapter also highlights both the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning mentioned in literature. Various studies are discussed, emphasizing the critical role of social interaction, preparation, and motivation in the success of online education. Additionally, the chapter compares different global approaches to distance learning, noting specific trends and tools, and their impacts on students' experiences and satisfaction.

Chapter 3 addresses the concept of quality of educational services, emphasizing its impact on the competitiveness and sustainability of educational institutions. Various definitions and approaches to educational quality are explored. Quality parameters for distance learning are identified with the help of the literature review. Additionally, the chapter discusses the specific challenges and strategies related to the distance learning quality in Polish and Ukrainian contexts.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design and methods with the main focus on the comparative case studies at Krakow University of Economics (KUE) and Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University (ZP).

Chapter 5 presents a detailed examination of the findings from the comparative case studies conducted at KUE and ZP, covering multiple perspectives on distance learning. The analysis includes Document Analysis of Ukrainian and Polish regulations and crisis responses, examining their impact on KUE and ZP. Certain insights from Academic Staff, Students, e-Learning Departments, IT Departments, and Employers are presented. The chapter concludes with an analysis synthesizing the data from all stakeholders, identifying common themes and significant findings, and a discussion interpreting the results in relation to existing literature and implications for possible policy and practice.

Chapter 6 proposes a framework for shaping the quality of distance learning at universities, based on parameters identified through literature, regulations, and feedback from stakeholders. The framework assigns specific quality parameters to responsible stakeholders and suggests evaluation methods for each parameter to ensure continuous improvement. It is designed to adapt to specific university conditions, aiming to improve DL quality through evaluation, academic planning, stakeholder engagement, policy development, and responsiveness to changing needs.

II. Research methodology

The main and detailed objectives/goals, as well as research questions are presented in the Introduction section of the dissertation (p. 6-8). Generally, the presentation of objectives is proper and meets scientific standards. The objective of the reviewed dissertation 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" (p. 7).

To achieve this objective, the Author sets four detailed goals (p. 7):

G1: Identification of the state-of-the-art approaches to the quality of educational services and the quality of distance learning. (Chapters 1, 2, and 3)

G2: Identification of stakeholders and their characteristics in university educational services in Poland and Ukraine. (Chapter 1)

G3: Identification and comparison of 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 (the abbreviation ZP is used for this research, however this university does not have an official acronym yet). (Chapter 5)

G4: Creation of a framework of shaping the quality of distance education that takes into account Polish and Ukrainian perspectives. (Chapter 6)

Generally, these goals fit with the main objective, and all are achieved by the PhD candidate through answering the following research questions (p. 7-8):

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 (e.g. students, academic staff, university administration, accreditation bodies, employers), taking into account the cultural dimension of learning (Polish and Ukrainian perspectives)?

The research questions are well formulated. To answer them, the PhD Student used a range of research methods.

III. Evaluation of the PhD dissertation

Svitlana Didkivska's PhD dissertation concerns the current state and issues of distance education, mainly its quality. Distance education is a cornerstone in maintaining the continuity of higher education in the circumstances of the global transition to digital learning modalities. Her research was motivated by the growing interest in distance learning, the new context of remote education that followed the

pandemic and Russian aggression against Ukraine, and the lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework that can be efficiently used in the context of Poland and Ukraine.

The PhD Student undertook the task of developing a framework for shaping the quality of distance learning that includes various stakeholders of an educational process, encompasses the lessons learned from the global switch to distance learning caused by the pandemic, and considers cultural aspects.

I evaluate the choice of the research subject and the formulation of the research problem positively.

To answer the research questions, a study that involves triangulation of research methods, data sources, and data analysis methods was conducted.

The methodologies of a narrative and systematic literature review were used to obtain information about state-of-the-art approaches to the educational services and their quality in the context of distance learning, for answering RQ1. These methods also contributed to answering RQ2, as they helped to identify approaches to the classification of university education stakeholders mentioned in literature.

I evaluate the choice of these data collection techniques positively.

To provide insights from KUE and ZP based on official regulations, desk research was conducted to analyze existing regulations, historical responses, and adaptations during crises. This involved reviewing government mandates, university policy, and academic literature, highlighting how these institutions transitioned to online and hybrid learning models amid crisis events. Additionally, a comparative analysis of official documents and reports from both universities provided insights into their approaches to ensuring educational continuity and quality under challenging circumstances.

I evaluate the choice of these techniques positively.

The next step was to conduct semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders, i.e. Students (51 persons), Academic Staff (20 persons), E-Learning Department staff (2 persons), IT Department staff (5 persons), and Employers (13 persons). The respondents were chosen using the purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Respondents were chosen based on their roles and involvement

in the distance learning educational process at two different universities. The study engaged specific groups where individuals were expected to have specialized knowledge about distance learning, such as the e-learning and IT departments. This is indicative of purposive sampling where participants are selected for their unique perspectives or expertise. Employers were chosen based on their direct experience with hiring graduates from the involved universities.

For data gathering, semi-structured interviews were used as a research tool, leveraging mainly Microsoft Teams for KUE and Zoom and Google Meet for ZP. Interviews with Polish employers and IT-department members were conducted in-person. In the subsequent phases of the research, the distance education quality parameters (outlined in tables), with results of interviews, were incorporated into the distance education quality assessment model at both KUE and ZP. All interviews were conducted with the participant's consent, subsequently transcribed and anonymized to uphold data confidentiality and integrity, aligning with the highest standards of research ethics.

I evaluate described procedure positively.

The thematic analysis focusing on the future creation of the Framework for Quality of Distance Education, utilized a structured approach to interpret and categorize the data gathered from various stakeholders. The thematic analysis had several iterations of self-verification to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. The results of the thematic analysis were meticulously organized into tables and pivot tables. These tables (Chapter 5) present a quantitative summary of the themes identified from the stakeholder interviews. They show the percentage of the mentions of each topic out of all identified topics for each respondent group. This quantitative approach facilitated a clear comparison of perceptions and experiences related to distance learning quality attributes across the two institutions, while the results for other stakeholders were organized qualitatively in tables give an opportunity to reach deeper into the insights and comments of respondents.

I evaluate the choice of this technique and the presentation of its results positively.

I also evaluate positively a proposition of a framework for shaping the quality of distance education (p. 119-120). I believe that technical, methodological, and organizational Quality Parameters are appropriate for this framework.

The list of references includes 277 sources presented in alphabetical order, which is sufficient for a PhD dissertation. Most of them are the articles in scientific journals. The list also includes books, conference proceedings, regulations, etc. The references are well selected and relevant for the dissertation. The most of references are in English and published in the last 10 years. Therefore, I evaluate the selection of literature as appropriate for a PhD dissertation.

IV. Comments on the content of the doctoral dissertation

1. The framework for shaping the quality of distance learning (Chapter 6) consists of Quality Parameters, Responsible Stakeholders, and Evaluation Methods. I believe it is not enough to ensure the quality of distance learning. It would be appropriate to identify:

- indicators that allow us to state that the quality level of distance education according to this parameter is sufficient;
- combinations of parameters that allow us to state that the quality level of distance education is sufficient.

It would be appropriate to develop procedures and specific tools (surveys) for stakeholders responsible for evaluating individual parameters, as well as procedures for shaping the quality of distance learning.

2. It would be appropriate to use the PRISMA methodology in its entirety and present the results in the form of an extended meta-analysis.

3. The formulations of the research objective in the Introduction (p. 7) and Conclusions (p. 128) are different.

4. The work would benefit from containing a procedure for assessing the quality of distance education in higher education institutions in general. It would serve as an assessment tool.

5. The author uses the term "conflict" which is not appropriate to the definition of Russia war against Ukraine (p. 50, 52, 61 etc.).

6. Other formal and typographical comments:

- some Ukrainian references in the list are given in English, but others in Ukrainian or in two languages;
- the following sources are included in references twice: Osova, O., Vakaluik, T., Panchenko, V., Didkivska, S., & Kontsedailo, V. (2021); Vakaliuk, T., Yefimenko, A., Bolotina, V., Bailiuk, Y., Pokotylo, O., & Didkivska, S. (2020); Vazquez, A., Verde, J., Dal Mas, F., Palermo, M., Cobianchi, L., Marescaux, J., . . . Gimenez, M. (2020).

V. Conclusion

PhD dissertation of Svitlana Didkivska concerns the issue of distance education – a cornerstone in maintaining the continuity of higher education in the circumstances of the global transition to digital learning modalities. The work is correctly constructed, although it contains the shortcomings indicated above.

The main contribution of the dissertation is developing a framework for shaping the quality of distance learning that includes various stakeholders of an educational process, encompasses the lessons learned from the global switch to distance learning caused by the pandemic, and considers cultural aspects. This is an original proposal for solving a scientific problem with significant application values. This demonstrates the PhD Student's well-established educational and IT knowledge, as well as the ability to conduct scientific work independently.

In my opinion, the PhD dissertation of Svitlana Didkivska entitled *An Enhancement of University Educational Services with the Use of Distance Learning: Polish and Ukrainian Perspectives*, submitted for review, meets the requirements set out in the Act “Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce z dnia 20.07.2018 (Dz. U. z 2018 r., poz. 1668 z późn. zm.)”, therefore I recommend the PhD Student to be admitted to the public defence.

