



## REVIEW OF DIPLOMA THESIS

**Review type:** Opponent's Review

**Author of the diploma thesis:** Jesús Arturo Medina Varela

**Title:** Equity Policies in Tertiary Education, The Case of the Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, Mexico. Analysis from Public Policies Theories

**Author of the review:** Mirna Jusić, M.A., Ph.D.

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*Evaluate the diploma thesis based on the following considerations (not necessarily in this order):*

1) *Factual benefits of work and its added value;*

In the light of a trend of educational inequality in tertiary education in Mexico, the author examines the case of the Universidad Autónoma Chapingo (UACH), which is an exception with its equity policies that have helped low-income students and those from indigenous groups access higher education. The author points out that, although there are reports and evaluations that have been done on this case study, there has not been research to date that would explain why they were implemented at the UACH. Thus, his work has aimed to fill this gap, by looking at the variables that led to the implementation of this policy. He applies the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) to that end. The author's main findings are that it was not a single variable but a combination of "circumstances, strategies and access to key resources adopted by the advocacy coalition" that have led to the successful adoption of equity policies. Beliefs and ideas of actors, dependent on the history of the institution, represent the most significant explanatory variable, in combination with other factors, such as stable parameters, external events, long term coalition opportunities. The study also points to the leadership role of a policy entrepreneur and his coalition, which was able to incite reform.

The value-added of the work is not just the in the very detailed analysis of the case study, which was also compared with other public institutions along chosen dimensions of educational equity, but also in the thorough application of the ACF in the context of higher education in Mexico, which also makes a contribution to the empirical literature on the ACF. To that end, the author has analyzed the stances of two coalitions using the framework. The Diagram in Table 27 represents an excellent overview of the key findings of the study through the prism of the ACF.

As also pointed out by the author, the research can offer valuable insights into how higher education institutions can work towards implementing equity policies in Mexico.

2) *Setting and answering research questions;*



The aim of the thesis is to “explain why current promoting educational equity policies have changed at the UACH if no external pressures forced them to implement these measures and their promoters did not emulate other state universities or nationals.” To that end, the author has set six further specific objectives.

The primary research question is: “Why do the actors in the Autonomous University of Chapingo promote social democratic equity policies if there are no external pressures to do so, and the majority of the public higher education institutions in Mexico promote meritocratic conservative policies?” In order to answer this question, the author has applied the ACF, including specific questions inherent to the framework (on the role of scientists and technical information in policymaking; how people mobilize, maintain, and act in advocacy coalitions in UACH; to what extent coalitions learn, especially from their allies and opponents; and what factors influence both minor and major policy changes). Research questions are answered in a satisfactory manner.

The author also presents and discusses core hypotheses posited by the ACF from the perspective of his own research findings in a systematic way.

### 3) *Structure of work;*

The work is structured very well. The summary at the beginning of the thesis provides an overview of the work. Chapter 1 provides an introduction, a definition of the problem, and the public policy theories used. Chapter 2 gives an overview of theories relating to justice and concepts of educational equity. Chapter 3 provides insights into the case study and its policies, analyzing it along the key analytical dimensions, and comparing it with other educational institutions along these dimensions. Chapter 4 applies the ACF to the case study. The final chapters include a conclusion and study limitations.

It would have been beneficial to have a separate methodological chapter. While the author explains how he has approached his case selection, how he has selected the other universities he compares the UACH with, as well as how he has conducted the 14 interviews at UACH, it may have provided for a better overview to have this explained in a separate chapter. It would have been good to include the interview guide in an Annex at the end of the thesis. The author does refer to individual questions he posed in footnotes when quoting respondents.

### 4) *The factual accuracy and convincing of the argumentation;*

The argumentation is well-written, supported by sufficient evidence, and convincing. The analysis is also exhaustive, and all aspects of the analytical framework have been taken addressed. The comparative analysis with other universities in Mexico is very detailed and the author has gathered exhaustive data for each of the institutions along the analytical dimensions. Institutions are compared in a systematic way – e.g. in Table 15 (p. 58). The analysis of the two coalitions (the social democrat and the meritocratic-conservative) based on interviews and the application of ACF is excellent (pp. 84-85).



There are only a few minor points:

- When discussing the limitations of the ACF, it would be good to incorporate other points of view – e.g. how Weible and other authors who have developed it further have responded to such critiques of the framework.
- While they are by no means representative, it would have been good to note how many of the interviewees supported one and how many the other stance (social democrat vs. meritocratic-conservative).
- It would have been good to elaborate a bit more on the strength of coalition B – the author states that they have “garnered support from sympathetic professors in the University Senate and internal political groups” within Chapingo, but it is not clear how strong this support is.
- While this is partly mentioned, it may have been good to note to what extent individual interviewees from Coalition A were involved in formulating the original reform.
- In the results section, the analysis switches between interviews and the analysis of documents/budgets, in line with the core elements of the ACF. The parts referring to interviews are more analytical and more directly apply the ACF. The ones pertaining to decisions/documents are more descriptive, and do not appear to directly discuss the concepts from ACF. The argumentation could have been structured differently to avoid description and present the results referring more explicitly to the concepts from the ACF in this part.
- It would have been advisable to include recommendations for further research in the conclusion.

#### 5) *Sophistication and application of theoretical approaches;*

The author has chosen to incorporate two theoretical perspectives: he relies on theories of the policy process, more specifically the ACF, as well as theories of justice, especially the work of Rawls. The author elegantly links ACF to theories of justice by arguing that “this research work requires establishing how various actors interpret educational equality from different ideological notions,” (p. 27), as ideas are of crucial importance to the ACF. The equity policies at UACH are analyzed from the perspective of dimensions proposed by Farrell (1997), which are also applied in the comparative analysis, comprising other public universities in Mexico.

Theoretical frameworks are presented in a comprehensive way and their selection is thoroughly justified. Very useful is the presentation of different ways of understanding equal opportunities in education (pp. 32-33). The discussion on the tension between merit and equity (pp. 35-36) is superb. The ACF has been applied in a comprehensive and systematic manner.

#### 6) *Methodological approach and application of particular methods and approaches;*

The author has chosen to do a case study of UACH. The choice of case study is very well explained. As the author writes, UACH is a prestigious public institution, consistently ranking high in terms of educational quality and has managed to “maneuver intelligently between the tensions generated by the search for indicators of excellence and, at the same time, skillfully implement educational justice and equity measures.”



The author combines: an analysis of literature on policies for educational equity in Mexico; a comparative analysis of UACH with a sample of other public universities, relying on available data and documents; and an analysis of documents and 14 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with respondents from UACH as he studies the advocacy coalitions within UACH. The choice of the four universities with which the UACH is compared is explained well, as is his approach to interviews. A section on the potential limitations of the methodological approach could have been added.

7) *Use of literature and data;*

Appropriate theoretical and empirical sources have been used, in a sufficient amount. In a few instances, for some of the claims, it is not always clear what the sources to back the claims are – e.g. when the different equity policies of universities compared are analyzed (pp. 56-57), or when the author writes about some political changes in Mexico and their impact on the university (e.g. p. 79).

Overall Turnitin similarity score is low (14%). Turnitin highlights some sentences or sentence fragments in a few paragraphs that are not paraphrased, and not placed in quotation marks, in the introductory parts. However, these are rare instances, and the author usually provides a source in such cases.

8) *Stylistic and text editing (quote, text layout, etc.).*

This is a well-written academic text with an appropriate layout. There are some minor spelling and grammar issues. There are smaller text editing issues, such as inconsistencies in figures with respect to usage of percentage signs, a few instances of missing punctuation, etc. Some of the figures are copied as pictures from other sources – since they are usually tables, they could have been generated by the author for a cleaner and more consistent layout (e.g. Figure 3 on p. 19). Page numbers are missing. In terms of layout, it would have been good to have numbered the headings and subheadings of different sections – this would have made for a more intuitive overview.

9) *Question for defense (not obligatory)*

There are a few comments above that the author may respond to during his defense.

**For the above reasons, I recommend the diploma thesis for the defense.**

**My grading is "A".**

Date: 6/6/2023

Signature: