

BACHELOR'S THESIS EXAMINER REPORT
PPE – Bachelor's in Politics, Philosophy and Economics
Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	The Impact of Trade Liberalization on Economic Growth in Latin America: A Comparative Analysis of Statistical Approaches
Student's name:	Sasha Goncharov
Referee's name:	Petr Špecían

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Contribution and argument (quality of research and analysis, originality)	50	25
	Research question (definition of objectives, plausibility of hypotheses)	15	8
	Theoretical framework (methods relevant to the research question)	15	7
Total		80	40
Minor Criteria			
	Sources, literature	10	5
	Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	5	3
	Manuscript form (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	5	3
Total		20	11
TOTAL		100	51

Plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score: 32 %

[NB:] If the plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score is above 15%, the reviewer has to include his/her assessment of the originality of the reviewed thesis in his/her review.

The similarity score appears to be triggered the list of the literature which is present twice in the thesis and by the somewhat generic descriptions in the theoretical part. Visual inspection of the results revealed no problematic cases.

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria (min. 1800 characters including spaces when recommending a passing grade, min. 2500 characters including spaces when recommending a failing grade):

Sasha Goncharov's thesis, "The Impact of Trade Liberalization on Economic Growth in Latin America: A Comparative Analysis of Statistical Approaches," attempts to address an interesting theme from a novel perspective. However, the execution of this ambitious project is marked by several significant issues that substantially impact its overall quality and reliability.

Strengths:

1. The chosen topic is relevant and potentially interesting, addressing the important relationship between trade liberalization and economic growth in Latin America.
2. The author demonstrates an attempt at empirical analysis, showing some engagement with quantitative methods in economics.

Weaknesses:

1. **Structure and Formal Issues:** a) There are unusual formatting issues, such as the literature list appearing both at the beginning (pp. 5-8) and end of the thesis. b) The abstract is overly brief and poorly formatted. c) Some figures lack sufficient description, particularly Figure 2.1. d) Page layout is inconsistent, with some pages half empty (e.g., p. 32).
2. **Content and Depth:** The thesis appears to lose steam after the promising introduction. Chapter 1 on trade policy is superficial and lacks any references to sources. Other critical parts of the thesis also read as preliminary sketches rather than thoroughly developed arguments. For instance, the key background in economic theory (e.g., comparative advantage, Heckscher-Ohlin) is inadequately explained and does not provide sufficient evidence to judge the author's understanding thereof. Moreover, the author often makes claims that are not clearly reasoned or supported by sources.
3. **Structural Issues:** The structure of Chapter 2 is strange, separating theoretical ideas from empirical evidence without persuasive justification (2.1-2.2). Chapter 2.3 shows some engagement with existing literature but is not properly tied to the preceding parts. All of this content feels rushed and shallow.
4. **Methodological Concerns** regarding the empirical part of the thesis:
 - a) **Sample Size and Selection:** The analysis is based on only 13 papers, which seems inadequate given the extensive literature in this field. It is unclear whether this small sample is the result of applying the filtering criteria described on pp. 22-23, or if there were other, undisclosed selection criteria. The specific 13 papers are not clearly identified, hampering the reader's ability to assess the representativeness of the sample.
 - b) **Testing Methodological Differences:** The rationale for testing systematic differences between methodologies is not well-established. The author's characterization of the lack of significant differences as "intriguing" (p. 29) is questionable. This result could simply indicate an absence of methodological bias, which should be the default expectation. The classification of methods is too high-level to detect meaningful differences. The devil tends to lurk in the details not in the obvious places.
 - c) **Comparability of Studies:** The author's treatment of the comparability issue (pp. 26-27) is unconvincing. Claiming that the lack of comparability is "a feature rather than a flaw" or that it captures "a more comprehensive picture" appears misguided. In fact, this approach seems to introduce a serious risk of a "garbage in, garbage out" problem, potentially invalidating the empirical analysis.
 - d) **Mischaracterization of Analysis:** The author occasionally writes as if they tested the direct effect of trade openness on growth (p. 30), which is not the case. This misrepresentation of the study's scope is concerning.
 - e) **Interpretation of Non-significant Results:** The detailed discussion of patterns in statistically non-significant results (p. 31) is methodologically questionable. If the author suspects meaningful patterns in these results, more robust statistical methods should have been employed to support such speculation.
 - f) **Inconsistent Analysis:** Some promised analyses, such as the effects of the end-year of the dataset, are not consistently addressed throughout the empirical section, only to reappear briefly towards the end. This inconsistency suggests a lack of systematic approach to the empirical analysis.

Overall Assessment:

The thesis opens more questions than it answers, both about the subject matter and about the author's skills in the chosen theme and methods. Unfortunately, the work is characterized by superficial treatment of complex topics, methodological inconsistencies, and formal issues that detract from its academic quality. Therefore, I propose a grade of E, allowing the author the opportunity to clarify and defend their work before the defense board.

Proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F): E

Suggested questions for the defence are:

1. You mention finding no statistically significant differences between methodologies, describing this as "intriguing". Can you elaborate on why you find this result surprising, and what implications you think it has for research in this field?
2. How do you think the limitations of your study, such as the small sample size and broad methodological categories, affect the generalizability of your findings? What steps would you take to address these limitations in future research?

I recommend the thesis for final defence.

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honor)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honor)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.