

IS SSE'S EDUCATION REALLY "FREE"?

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A STUDY OF FUNCTIONAL STUPIDITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Is SSE's education really "FREE"?

Abstract:

This thesis aims to investigate to what extent higher education suffers from Functional Stupidity and thereby inhibits students from developing critical and reflective thinking. Specifically, the thesis studies the Stockholm School of Economics with the aim of answering the research question: *"To what extent is Stockholm School of Economic's education influenced by Functional Stupidity, and why?"* A qualitative research method collected empirics through interviews with educators and students as well as seminar observations. The result revealed that the Stockholm School of Economics suffers from Functional Stupidity to a moderate to a high degree. The main explanatory factors were considered Brand and Culture. Given the result, students may struggle to develop critical and reflective thinking in higher education and thus not possess the demanded abilities to tackle future challenges. Hence, the thesis encourages a more comprehensive discussion within higher education about how to foster critical and reflective thinking and counter Functional Stupidity. It also contributes a new perspective on Functional Stupidity by studying an educational setting.

Keywords:

Functional Stupidity, Higher Education, Critical Thinking, Reflective Thinking, Stockholm School of Economics

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Linn & Nina

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Definitions

Table 1. Definitions

Concept	Definition
Functional Stupidity	A phenomenon that causes competent individuals to perform tasks correctly but stop reflecting on their purpose and consequences in a larger context (Alvesson & Spicer 2018).
Critical Thinking	An ability to independently be able to analyze, reflect, draw conclusions, evaluate, question, and be creative on a scientific basis (Scriven & Paul, 1987).
Reflective Thinking	A reflective thinker actively considers her actions and their consequences in the wider context (Bugg & Dewey, 1934).
Qualitative Courses	Courses defined as qualitative mainly deal with words and meanings and involve a descriptive judgment using conceptual words instead of numbers (Streefkerk, 2019). This involves the following BE courses: Global Challenges, Management, Marketing, Strategy, Innovation, Business Law, and Reflection Series.
Quantitative Courses	Courses defined as quantitative deal primarily with numbers and statistics that have either quantitative or formal reasoning as part of their primary subject matter (Streefkerk, 2019). This involves the following BE courses: Data Analytics, Accounting, Finance, Macroeconomics, and Microeconomics.

Abbreviations

Table 2. Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
SSE	Stockholm School of Economics
FS	Functional Stupidity
CRT	Critical and Reflective thinking
BE	Bachelor of Science program in Business and Economics
21st Framework	The Twenty-first-century skills framework

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Have you ever wondered why a thesis is written in a certain order? You probably think “because one should follow a predetermined template”, without reflecting further. Indeed, a template can hasten and facilitate writing, which saves both time and energy. But if we constantly follow templates and stop questioning their purpose and actual usefulness, what happens then?

In today’s knowledge economy, critical and reflective thinking (henceforth CRT) is identified as increasingly important abilities to possess (Dede, 2009; Mahmud & Wong, 2022; OECD, 2019). Accordingly, the Swedish Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434) stipulates that higher education should educate and promote CRT. Stockholm School of Economics (henceforth SSE), one of the Nordics' foremost business schools (Stockholm School of Economics, b), incorporates this directive into its educational ambitions (Stockholm School of Economics, a), which are summarized in the acronym FREE (Table 3). But despite these ambitions, Alvesson & Spicer (2018) believe that a phenomenon defined as Functional Stupidity (henceforth FS) prevails in most institutions. This means that competent individuals shut down their reflective thinking to follow predetermined templates (Eisenhardt & Sull, 2001), impressive brands (Assaf, 2009), strong cultures (Morris & Empson, 1998), etc. This provides short-term efficiencies but eventually long-term problems (Alvesson & Spicer, 2018). Consequently, when FS is present, CRT is inhibited. The ambitions of the Higher Education Act and FREE would then fail and thereby students might not develop the demanded skills for professional life and future challenges. This leaves FS to be a paradox - useful but devastating.

This thesis thus aims to investigate to what extent higher education suffers from FS and thereby inhibits students from developing CRT. The theoretical lens of FS will specifically examine the occurrence at SSE, which explicitly states to promote CRT through FREE. The results are expected to contribute to the discourse on higher education's promotion of CRT. As society changes and more complex challenges approach, it becomes crucial for educational institutions to adapt accordingly and ensure that students develop the necessary skills.

1.2. Prior research and research gap

The theory of FS is based on numerous theories and scientific literature that are well-discussed in the academic world, such as groupthink (Janis, 2008), organizational theory (Alvesson, 2006; Brunsson, 2014a; Brunsson, 2014b), organizational culture (Morris & Empson, 1998), and brand identity (Giorgi & Weber, 2015). However, since this thesis will focus on the collective concept of FS, these are excluded from this specific research discussion.

The concept of FS is mentioned to a limited extent in academic literature and theses. Mats Alvesson, one of the concept's founders, discusses it most frequently and continuously investigates FS in new contexts. At a Bachelor's level, three theses have investigated the presence of it. One study in an organization (Borglin, 2019) and two in professional groups (Åkesson, 2021; Tidesten & Bodelind, 2019). The limited extent of academic papers in the field thus leaves FS relatively untested. Hence, this thesis covers an academic research gap by investigating the prevalence of FS in higher education.

1.3. Aim and Research question

This thesis aims to investigate the extent of FS found in higher education. This is of interest since today's knowledge economy and the Swedish Higher Education Act expect higher education to promote CRT students. Nevertheless, in the presence of FS, the development of CRT is inhibited. Hence, this thesis will investigate the extent of FS found at SSE, which explicitly purports to educate CRT practitioners in its educational ambitions of FREE. Accordingly, the research question reads:

To what extent is Stockholm School of Economic's education influenced by Functional Stupidity, and why?

1.4. Intended contributions

The result is expected to have both practical use and theoretical relevance. Practically, this thesis highlights the link between CRT and FS in the educational discourse. If education suffers from FS, it instead promotes a lack of reflection, questioning, or reasoning (Alvesson & Spicer, 2018; Jackall, 1988). That would imply that students instead fail to develop the necessary skills to tackle future challenges (Dede, 2009; Mahmud & Wong, 2022; OECD, 2019). Hence, by prompting a greater awareness of

these connections and insights about their implications, the higher education discourse can have a more comprehensive discussion of how to promote CRT and avoid FS.

Moreover, the thesis gains theoretical relevance by providing a new perspective on FS and by contrasting CRT with existing literature. No essay has yet investigated FS in an educational setting. Likewise, no current literature on CRT has contrasted it with FS. This relationship shows both the importance of CRT but also what can inhibit its development and the consequences of its absence. Thus, this essay aims to broaden the perspectives of existing literature and theory.

1.5.Delimitation

Given the research question, the study will be delimited to *SSE*, since it explicitly states to promote CRT through *FREE*. In addition, the authors themselves are students at the school, which facilitated the collection of empirical data. Other Swedish business schools are thus excluded from the sample. At *SSE*, the thesis will specifically be delimited to the mandatory classes of the Bachelor of Science program in Business and Economics, i.e. years 1 and 2. These classes provide a broader scope of courses than *SSE* programs with a specialization focus. They are also generally equivalent to other comparable business schools, which increases the degree of generalization. Besides, Bachelor's programs can be considered to lay the foundation for BE year 3 and the Master's programs. Hence, the result ought to apply to them as well.

Furthermore, the research is delimited to investigate the extent to which *education* suffers FS at *SSE*. Therefore, other objectives, such as specific classes or the student association, will not be examined. However, the research will consider several explanatory factors to arrive at an answer, which may include aspects other than formal education.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Theory Usage

An educational environment involves many social actors, formalities, and informalities. The co-created reality results in structures, culture, and common beliefs that eventually can be taken for granted (Brunsson, 2014a). It can therefore be challenging to identify prevailing assumptions and how these affect education. To comprehend the educational environment at SSE, the lens of FS will be used as a tool.

FS was developed by Alvesson and Spicer (2018) based on numerous theories and scientific literature. Reality is seen as constructed and reinforced by the involved actors. People are assumed to be competent with the ability to freely choose their actions. A dominant hygiene factor, an element that satisfies basic needs (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959), is belongingness to a group as it creates a feeling of security (Alvesson & Spicer, 2018). Important motivator factors, elements that increase intrinsic motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959), are autonomy and freedom of choice (Alvesson & Spicer, 2018). As such, the theory (Alvesson & Spicer, 2018) considers that the actors' needs are constructed and influenced by the social context or institution.

2.2. Functional Stupidity

FS appears when competent individuals perform tasks correctly but stop reflecting on their purpose and consequences in the larger context (Alvesson & Spicer, 2018). This is illustrated by the example of the Volkswagen scandal (Reuters, 2021):

Volkswagen was imbued with a very optimistic culture that neglected problems and CRT. Thus, they managed to get their employees to manipulate emissions tests for their cars. Consequently, Volkswagen's cars caused much higher levels of air pollution than allowed, creating long-term health and environmental consequences worldwide.

This example reveals the dynamic of FS: When people shut down their cognitive reflection, short-term benefits can be reaped but simultaneously create long-term problems. According to Alvesson and Spicer (2018), FS can be found in almost all organizations and social constructions but is sometimes hard to detect. To successfully identify it, one should look for three warning signs (Jackall, 1988):

1) Lack of reflexivity

The person takes dominant expectations and assumptions for granted as correct. Norms and routines are thus considered to be completely natural.

2) Lack of questioning

The person stops questioning “why” she performs a task or action. She follows the rule even though no one knows why it exists.

3) Lack of substantial reasoning

The person stops considering the consequences or the greater purpose of the action. Instead, she focuses on narrow issues about how something should be, rather than whether something should be done at all.

2.2.1. Generating Functional Stupidity

Alvesson and Spicer (2018) highlight five aspects that seem to generate FS: Leadership, Structures, Imitation, Brand, and Culture (Appendix 1). This thesis will focus on the last four. Leadership is excluded since the teacher-student relationship is limited to a temporary course. It would therefore be difficult to draw significant conclusions if it generates FS or not. Continuing, SSE's practical education is investigated through Structure and Imitation. For example, why are students tested in a certain way? SSE's underlying assumptions and structures, which influence education, are examined through Brand and Culture. For example, does SSE's brand create expectations on education?

2.2.1.1 Structure-generated stupidity

Rules and routines create FS when they are senseless and exploited for superficial legitimacy (Graeber, 2015). Standardized tasks reduce the risk of errors and save time, but inhibit individual reflection and development (Eisenhardt & Sull, 2001). They can also result in an overly optimistic and strong trust in the institution with large discrepancies between reality and people's perceptions (Kjærgaard, Morsing, & Ravasi, 2011). Consequently, Kjærgaard et. al. argue that it becomes difficult to identify problems that will affect the organization's long-term prosperity and functioning. The organization ends up delivering everything formally correct but struggles to perform the central, internal tasks (Heffernan, 2011).

2.2.1.2 Imitation-generated stupidity

Organizations and people imitate each other to avoid being seen as stupid in an idiosyncratic position (Giorgi & Weber, 2015). To conform to the expectations of the masses, organizations often adopt "best practice" because it is seen as "normal" or "appropriate", Giorgi and Weber further claim. However, the internal application may be difficult as the practice is unadapted to context-specific conditions (Westphal, Gulati, & Shortell, 1997). Organizations can thus be considered legitimate as long as they live up to external expectations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

2.2.1.3 Brand-generated stupidity

Brand fixation causes individuals and organizations to choose the "right" brand over more important aspects such as quality and meaningfulness (Assaf, 2009), which indicates FS. For example, organizations are more likely to take the advice of well-known consulting firms more seriously, regardless of what they propose, because it strengthens the external image of modernity and legitimacy. Likewise, advanced job titles can boost individuals' self-esteem and encourage them to perform routine, mindless work (Ottati, Price, Wilson, & Sumaktoyo, 2015). The most important thing is not what you actually do for work, but what others think you carry out for work (Alvesson, 2006).

2.2.1.4 Culture-generated stupidity

A strong organizational culture can cause FS when the group "March to the same music without thinking about it" (Alvesson, 2015; Morris & Empson, 1998). Similarly, a perceived "unique" organizational culture acts as an identity booster that unites group members (Miller, Kets de Vries, & Manfred, 1984). Accordingly, Miller et. al. believe that some assumptions and perceptions are simply taken for granted as unquestionably superior, making alternative ideas considered disruptive. Consequently, groupthink (Janis, 2008) develops that members unconsciously internalize, creating rigid ways of understanding the world.

2.2.2. Consequences of Functional Stupidity

In the short term, thoughtlessness becomes functional, i.e. useful, in the form of increased efficiency and satisfying power balances (Graeber, 2015). Few questions and deeper justifications for actions reduce the time and resources spent on a task (Brunsson, 2014b), and conforming avoids endangering the hygiene factor of belonging (Alvesson & Spicer, 2018; Herzberg et al., 1959). In an educational environment, this

can be recognized by students prioritizing passing courses quickly and educators prioritizing satisfying students to deliver good evaluation statistics. In the longer term, however, the lack of reflection and probing questions risks leading to major problems (Bidwell, 2015; Glazer & Alford, 2002). Students' knowledge risks being undermined and limited to memorized frameworks and educators may erode the quality of education to satisfy students. This leaves FS to be a paradox - useful but devastating.

2.3. Theory Discussion

FS provides a lens to examine contexts from several different theoretical perspectives simultaneously, which is its main advantage. For example, rather than focusing solely on groupthink (Janis, 2008) as an explanatory factor for a strong culture, the aspects of a strong brand can also be considered simultaneously or in conjunction (Alvesson, 2006; Assaf, 2009; Ottati et al., 2015). The lens also provides a clear framework for how, when, and where FS can be generated, making it easier to identify it. Yet, the framework does not cover the whole reality. One should therefore be observant of other signs and aspects as well. For example, by limiting the analysis to certain generating conditions others risk being overlooked. Hence, the result is affected by which aspects the authors have considered.

Critics of FS (Butler, 2016) claim that it is only a management buzzword, meaning that corporate language uses it but without practical substance (Husson University, 2022). For example, Butler (2016) considers that the framework is ambiguous regarding how much CRT an organization should encourage in order to gain both short-term and long-term benefits. In addition, excessive generalizations are sometimes made, according to us. For example, Alvesson and Spicer (2018) believe that consulting solutions are just placebo solutions.

2.4. Theory Summary

The paradox of FS provides short-term valuable benefits but long-term problems. It can be difficult to detect FS as reality is constructed and influenced by the social context (Alvesson & Spicer, 2018; Miller et al., 1984). To succeed, one should search for three warning signs: Lack of reflexivity, Lack of questioning, and Lack of substantial reasoning. These can be generated by Structures, Imitation, Brand, and Culture. The process of investigating FS is thus multidimensional and illustrated in Figure 1. This thesis will systematically examine each chosen perspective to understand the extent each generates FS.

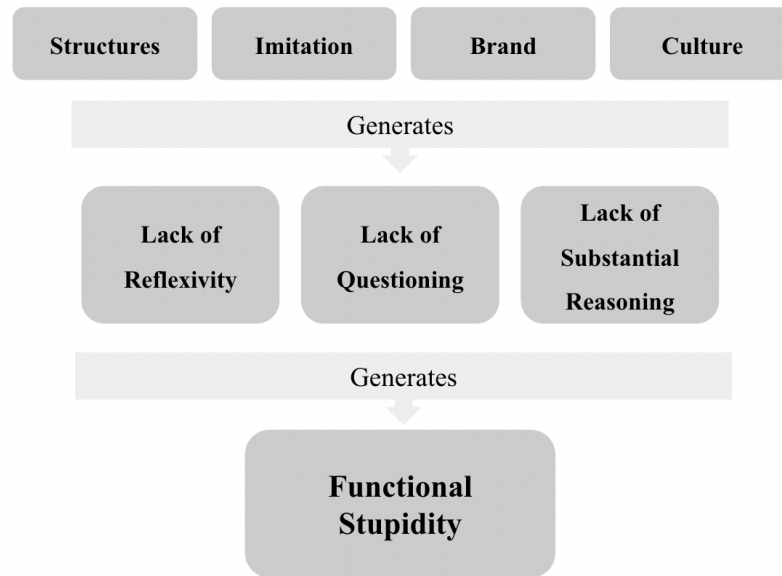


Figure 1. The multidimensional process of investigating Functional Stupidity
(Jansson, Erlandsson 2022)

3. Literature Review

3.1. Critical and Reflective Thinking

A critical thinker has the ability to improve her quality of thinking by analyzing, reflecting, evaluating, and questioning on a scientific basis (Scriven & Paul, 1987). A reflective thinker actively considers her actions and their consequences in the wider context (Bugg & Dewey, 1934). Both abilities, CRT, are encouraged in the higher education discourse and considered increasingly essential to meet the demands of future challenges, according to the business world and society. However, in the presence of FS, CRT tends to diminish. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

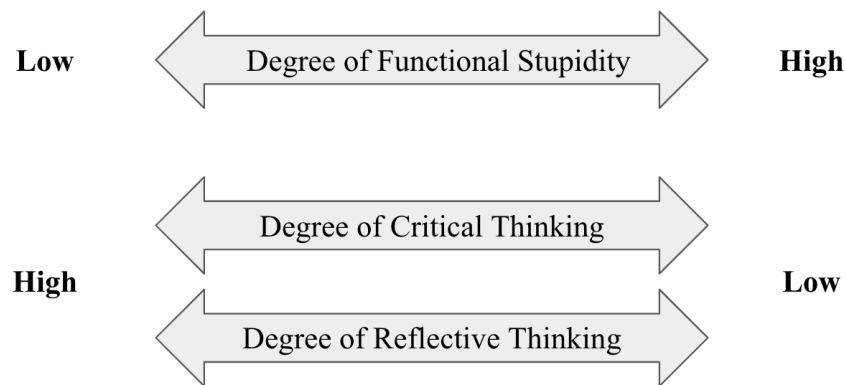


Figure 2. Relationship between FS and CRT (Jansson, Erlandsson 2022)

3.2. Higher Education in Sweden

3.2.1. The Higher Education Act

In Sweden, all higher education must comply with the first chapter of the Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434). The Act prescribes how education should be conducted, researchers' responsibilities, students' rights, regulations for degrees, etcetera. Chapter 1 also claims that education should develop students' CRT as well as the ability to solve complex problems.

3.2.2. Educating Critical and Reflective Thinking

To successfully educate CRT, students must first have sufficient fact-based knowledge of the subject (Benander & Lightner, 2005; Willingham, 2008). For example, asking a business student to apply CRT to a medical question becomes quite difficult because she

is unfamiliar with what she is evaluating. Benander & Lightner (2005) further mean that it is crucial that educators help students to practice CRT and that the social surrounding encourages the skill. Otherwise, the skills might not transfer from the classroom to real-world problems. On the other hand, Willingham (2008) claims that the ability is not transferable between subjects and that an attempt to teach a general ability consequently is doomed to failure.

Moreover, the development of CRT risks facing several obstacles in higher education. First, today's examinations are considered too conventional (Dede, 2009). Rather than testing the ability to transfer understanding to a real-world problem, Dede means that assessments often emphasize memorizing information. Second, educators possess insufficient educational skills for students to develop higher thinking (Aliakbari & Sadeghdaghighi, 2013; Franco, Vieira, & Tenreiro-Vieira, 2018). Training educators adequately is time-consuming and therefore risks becoming both a financial and priority issue (Dede, 2009).

3.3. Stockholm School of Economics

SSE is one of Europe's leading business schools with 2000 students (Stockholm School of Economics, b). The university is primarily financed by private sources (Handelshogskolan i Stockholm, 2020) such as business partners, foundations, and individuals with close connections to the Swedish business world.

The Bachelor of Science program in Business and Economics (henceforth BE) enrolls 300 students annually and has the highest grade limit for admission to all business schools in Sweden (Universitets- och hogskoleradet). The program provides solid business and economic education in both qualitative and quantitative courses (Table 1). It also includes a mandatory course named Reflections Series (Stockholm School of Economics, c) in the first two years, which is neither graded nor credited. Rather, the purpose is solely to promote CRT to enhance development beyond the skill-oriented classes. The initiative also aims to link all courses and support SSE's overall educational ambitions articulated in FREE.

3.3.1. FREE

Alongside the first chapter in the Higher Education Act, SSE has articulated its own educational ambitions through the acronym FREE (Table 3). The school considers itself to educate future leaders, besides business and economics studies (Stockholm School of Economics, a). Accordingly, SSE claims that students should master a reflective,

empathetic, and entrepreneurial mindset based on facts in order to become successful decision-makers.

Table 3. FREE

Concept	Definition
F - Fact and Science-based mindset	As a scientific institution, facts are the foundation of all thinking.
R - Reflective and Self-aware	Students should consider their impact on others, their role in the world, and how their choices are determined.
E - Empathetic And Culturally Literate	To become good leaders and decision-makers, students should strive to be empathetic and culturally literate.
E - Entrepreneurial And Responsible	Students should strive to challenge the status quo and seek improvement for society and the world at large through an entrepreneurial lens.

With regards to the research aim and question, this study will delimit the focus of FREE to R - Reflective. Yet it is important to acknowledge that the research is conducted in an educational environment where a Fact- and Science-based mindset is dominant. This will be taken into account when analyzing the collected information, to avoid drawing non-contextual conclusions.

3.4. Business World and Society

In an accelerating pace of change in society, the Twenty-first Century Skills Framework (henceforth 21st Framework) asserts CRT as a key skill to master (Dede, 2009). The framework was developed by business leaders, academics, and authorities to identify key cognitive and soft skills of the future. The findings suggest that individuals who can reflect and act critically are equipped to meet the demands of global and future challenges such as globalization and diverse societies. This is further supported by the OECD's (2019) forecast of important educational skills in 2030 and stakeholder views on key skills attributed to employability (Mahmud & Wong, 2022). As students face unknown and evolving circumstances, CRT can add value to workplaces and thus increase the overall productivity of the economy (OECD, 2019).

Critics of the 21st framework (Davies, 2018) however mean that it neglects fundamental skills for soft skills. By overemphasizing soft skills such as CRT, fundamental skills such as reading and writing are neglected. Consequently, both skills eventually deteriorate. Besides, as soft skills are hard to test in reliable, cost-effective, or scalable ways they become meaningless educational settings (Silva, 2009). As a result, Silvia suggests that it rather distracts educators from real educational content and disadvantages fundamental long-term learning outcomes.

3.5.Literature Summary

In sum, the higher discourse in Sweden undoubtedly highlights the importance of CRT. The abilities are expected to be taught in higher education, which is clearly stated in the Higher Education Act and FREE. However, if education suffers from FS, students are inhibited from developing CRT. That would affect both societal and business development, according to the 21st framework, OECD, and employers. These connections are illustrated in Figure 3. With this background, the thesis now continues to investigate to what extent FS exists and why at SSE.

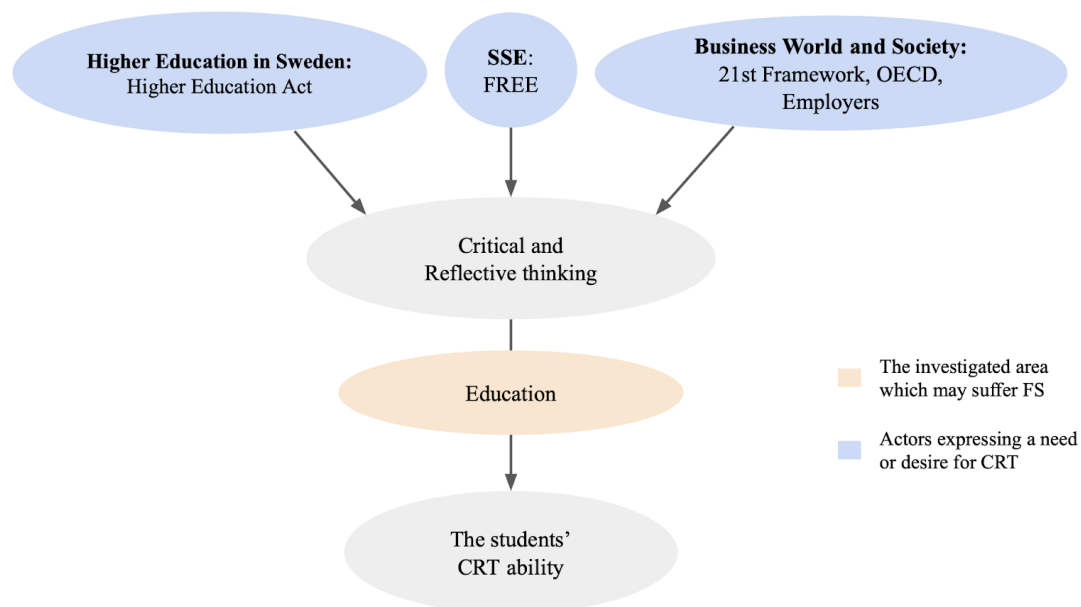


Figure 3. The connections within the literature review and with theory (Jansson, Erlandsson 2022)

4. Methodology

4.1.Choice of Method

4.1.1.Research Paradigm

In ontology, the thesis adopts a subjective viewpoint (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019) as the research attempts to understand multiple realities of the same context and situations. Subjectivism means that reality is socially constructed through shared meanings. To understand and challenge this reality, through the lens of FS, a critical epistemology (Saunders et al., 2019) is further used. Such a paradigm is appropriate as it sees reality as external and independent of the existence of FS. It is also suitable since it is assumed to exist underlying power structures that affect the result.

Prevailing power structures are expected to be both formal and informal (Peiro & Melia, 2003). Formally, educators have decision-making power over students and power over the agenda (Lukes, 1974). Likewise, SSE's management can control the institution but is simultaneously dependent on private financiers which thereby can assert power over SSE. Informally, students also have power over the agenda and decision-making power (Lukes, 1974) over the educators because their course evaluations serve as a legitimization of the educators' education. These mentioned power structures are assumed to be expressed in the form of functionality, i.e. usability, for different actors in different situations as described in 2.2.2.

4.1.2.Research Method

A qualitative method with semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2019) was chosen as it facilitates understanding the prevailing underlying assumptions and structures by letting respondents share their inner thoughts and perspectives. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewers to probe the interviewees' answers and thoughts further by adapting the questions.

Moreover, the thesis was developed in an abductive process (Suddaby, 2006). This enabled the study to have an explorative approach (March, 1991) toward the "Why" part of the research question. As the empirical evidence was collected, underlying causes were identified that were difficult to assume in advance. Thus, the abductive method enabled the complementation of insights and theories.

4.2.Data Collection

The empirical data was collected through interviews with educators and students, as well as seminar observations. Such methodological triangulation (Noble & Heale, 2019) takes into account multiple perspectives of the same phenomenon. This was particularly useful as the difficulty in detecting FS complicates the validity of the results. Although the FS framework clearly provides arguments for and against FS, it is ultimately a matter of interpretation. Hence, the triangulation increases the accuracy of the author's understanding of the subjective reality and the presence of taken-for-granted assumptions. In turn, the validity and credibility of the results are strengthened.

4.2.1.Interviews

4.2.1.1 Interviews with Educators

A total of seven interviews were conducted with educators, four in quantitative courses and three in qualitative courses. These were held physically after the observed seminar, of which six interviews were conducted in the teacher's office and one in a classroom. The interviews lasted on average 30 minutes and followed a semi-structured template (Appendix 2).

A self-selection sampling (Saunders et al., 2019) was used to select educators. The researchers sent an invitation to each respective course director, who then sent out an invitation to the educators. This reduced the risk of subjective selection by the researchers but simultaneously increased the risk of only attracting certain participants such as outspoken educators. Although it risked making the population less representative, such an approach was useful in this thesis because available seminar educators were limited.

4.2.1.2 Interviews with Students

A total of five interviews were conducted with attending seminar students. These were held physically after the observed seminar in the student associations' premises at the school. The interviews lasted on average 19 minutes and followed a semi-structured template (Appendix 3).

Students were selected through a heterogeneous sampling method (Saunders et al., 2019) by the researchers after the seminars. Although such a deliberate selection of different genders and different degrees of active participants becomes subject to

judgmental selection, it allowed a more representative sample. This in turn increases the validity of the results.

4.2.2.Seminar Observations

A total of five seminars were observed in which the interviewed educators and students participated. During the seminars, an unstructured participant observation method (Saunders et al., 2019) was used. The flexible approach is appropriate because different courses had different seminar designs. The observers were observer-as-participants (Saunders et al., 2019), acting merely as spectators but revealing the purpose of their presence for the seminar teacher. To mitigate the risk that the latter would affect the educators' actions during the seminars, interviews were held after the seminars.

The observations aimed to collect empirics unaffected by taken-for-granted assumptions, which interviews can be influenced by, to reduce biases and increase the reliability of the results (Sallis, Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, 2021). This was primarily important from the FS perspectives of Structure and Imitation that examined education. For example, the researchers could better understand how the seminars were conducted and how much CRT was actually promoted during the seminars, rather than just listening to the interviewees' responses. However, the observations did not contribute too significant insights, whereas the researchers were satisfied with five observations. Consequently, the observations constitute only a marginal part of the empirics and analysis.

4.3.Coding and analysis

After the first eight interviews, equally divided between educators and students, the collected empirical data were organized in a thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2019) according to the selected generating perspectives for FS. Thereafter, four additional interviews were held to further investigate some identified patterns and underlying explanatory factors, in accordance with an abductive method (Suddaby, 2006). A total of three educators and one student were included in this sample, whereof two educators have overall responsibility for education at SSE. During these interviews, the questions were more adapted to the respondent's role and thus somewhat more unstructured than the first round of interviews. After a total of 12 conducted interviews, an empirical saturation was experienced. With the approval of the respondents, all interviews were recorded and transcribed.

4.4.Ethical Consideration and Implications

This study has followed the GDPR through SSE's OGC guide and by adapting taken implications to the investigated institution. Some specific measures that the researchers have taken are described below.

First, anonymity is ensured by using non-identifiable names throughout the thesis. Yet, given that the study is carried out at SSE, delimited to the mandatory Autumn courses at BE, and reveals whether it is a qualitative or quantitative course, the anonymity of the educators can be questioned. This has been addressed by eliminating course-specific responses that may identify any educator.

Furthermore, during the attended seminars, the participating students were unaware that they were being observed. Involuntary data may thus have been collected. However, this has been addressed by excluding students from the observation empirics. Rather, only educators' actions and expressions are presented, as they were consciously observed.

Finally, all interviewees could avoid answering questions to ensure their voluntariness. This was particularly important given that they are part of the social context and institution that the thesis critically examines. Therefore, certain questions can be perceived as sensitive to answer due to, for example, underlying power structures. Simultaneously, given the critical epistemology aimed at uncovering underlying assumptions, the interviewees were uninformed about the research question before answering. This somewhat offsets the risk of not daring to answer certain questions and thus ensured unbiased answers that guaranteed a reliable analysis.

4.5.Discussion of Method

First, the delimitation to BE years 1 and 2 limits the available data to collect and represents a minority of the SSE's population (~600/2000). This may skew the result and thus reduce its validity and transferability to the whole institution. Simultaneously, all Bachelor's third-year students and many of the Master's students have been taught in the studied classes, suggesting that the results ought to apply to them as well. Hence, the risk of a skewed result is mitigated.

Second, if the interviewees suffer from FS they may overlook or not mention certain prevailing assumptions. This risk is mitigated in two ways. First, methodological triangulation (Noble & Heale, 2019) considers several perspectives of the same phenomenon. This facilitates the identification of taken-for-granted arrangements and

the extent of FS. Second, if the interviewee's degree of reflection is judged by the interviewers to be somewhat low, the semi-structured questions (Saunders et al., 2019) can be asked differently to elicit reflection.

Lastly, being students ourselves in the studied context increases the risk that we also suffer FS and thereby fail to identify underlying structures and assumptions that we take for granted (Brunsson, 2014a). Similarly, our own experiences of SSE and its education can affect interpretations and observations. Hence, there is a risk that we bias the analysis of the empirical data and the results. Although one can consciously try to counteract this through reflection and questioning, we are participants and co-creators of social reality, which makes it difficult in practice. Instead, methodological triangulation (Noble & Heale, 2019) is used to mitigate this risk.

5. Empirics

The empirical data is structured after the selected FS perspectives: Structure, Imitation, Brand, and Culture. Each part will also distinguish between educators, students, and observations. Table 4 gives all interviewees a designation that will be used in quotations and indicates whether an interviewee was interviewed for a qualitative or quantitative course. The order is randomized and thus does not follow the actual order of the interviews.

Table 4. List of interviewed educators and students, and observed seminars

Course Types	Interviewed Educators	Interviewed Students	Observed Seminars
Quantitative	E1	S1	O1
Qualitative	E2	S2	O2
Qualitative	E3	S3	O3
Quantitative	E4	S4	O4
Quantitative	E5	S5	O5
Qualitative	E6		
Qualitative/Quantitative	E7		

5.1. The Structure Perspective

5.1.1. Interviews with Educators

Course directors usually plan the content, while seminar educators choose how to teach it. There are seldom other guidelines from top management, which educators appreciate: *“The knowledge we teach develops over time. So there cannot be a strict line to this”* - E5. Similarly, E7 believes that no one should interfere because educators are experts in their field.

Students can greatly influence the design since it is important to satisfy them, according to E2 and E4. *“We gradually adapt the seminar tasks to the student's level and what is reasonable to demand of them. /.../ That makes the students very calm”* - E2. Simultaneously, E7 underlines that educators should not agree with everything the

students suggest: *“Students don’t always understand what is important in the future. It’s therefore important to stick to certain parts, even if it may be unpopular”*.

Educators strive to provide students with a broad toolbox of skills. E5 refers to FREE and wants students to develop CRT: *“Students should understand things in depth rather than memorizing”*. Likewise, E6 considers general academic knowledge more important than concrete skills to deal with future societal challenges.

To test the students’ knowledge, written exams are optimal according to most educators. E2 claims that it rewards the right thing: *“Taking what you have learned and applying it to a relevant issue”*. Similarly, E3 means *“I see no other way than written exams. Discussions are time-consuming, expensive, and can only test the students on certain models”*. However, E6 believes that written exams only remain due to tradition and E1 reveals that: *“Written exams aren’t my choice. This is determined by the program, independent of me”*.

Lastly, there are differing opinions about the Reflection Series. The non-standardized course structure frustrates some educators because the students desire the same content. E7 initially considered the addition inappropriate because it forced reflectivity into the program but now realizes the advantage of tying all courses together. Simultaneously, the educators testify that students consider reflection unnecessary to become financial analysts and thus are uninterested in the course: *“Students claim that they would have tried harder if they could get the grade excellent in the course”* - E6.

5.1.2. Interviews with Students

Most students feel that the predetermined seminar content allows a limited amount of CRT. S5 learns a lot but finds much repetition. S4 witnesses differences in quantitative and qualitative courses: *“In quantitative subjects, we should neither reflect on the answers nor evaluate or discuss current real cases. However, in qualitative subjects, it’s much more reflecting”*. S1, on the other hand, claims that education is well adapted to current challenges and S2 does not appreciate when they should be active during the seminars: *“Almost no one has time to prepare for seminars, so all seminar teachers should assume that no student has prepared the assignments and has no questions”*.

Written exams are considered an efficient and fair examination method but often result in memorizing concepts: *“It’s a black-and-white way of assessing knowledge /.../ But when we aren’t allowed to have formula sheets the whole exam is just about remembering rather than testing the analytical skills”* - S2. The method is therefore

perceived as conventional and upsets many students: *"SSE claims to prepare us for reality, but how often do you get tested like this at work? Getting a task with X number of hours to solve without help. /.../ They talk about changing the school, but the system looks just like it did 100 years ago"* - S1. To promote deeper learning, S3 and S5 would prefer discussions as it allows more reflection.

The Reflection Series course is not considered to fulfill its purpose: *"The purpose of the Reflection Series is to reflect on education and what we learn. But that is certainly not what we do"* - S4. Rather, it is described as unrelated to today's challenges which causes students to lose interest and engagement: *"No one really takes the course seriously, not even our teacher. I think the addition of this course was unnecessary, I didn't learn anything"* - S2.

5.1.3.Observations

Most seminars are moderated dominantly by the teacher, while some encourage student discussion. O4 encouraged questions but focused on delivering the right answers. Students who reasoned differently were therefore often neglected and considered to think wrong. Moreover, O2 and O3's educators asserted *"There is no right or wrong"* but simultaneously reprimanded students for correct interpretations and definitions when they thought differently. Similarly, if students were highly engaged in discussions outside the predefined structure or asked questions outside the scope of the assignment, E2 interrupted in O2 to redirect them to the framework and not go *"Too far"*.

5.2.The Imitation Perspective

5.2.1.Interviews with Educators

SSE's goal of FREE seems important to integrate into education. E5 never gives students strict answers, but rather encourages different interpretations of models and E3 says: *"I want students to reflect and then return later and say I'm wrong"*. In contrast, E7 claims that FREE should not be forced on all courses but only the most relevant ones. In more basic and fact-based courses, it is difficult to incorporate too much CRT.

External expectations of education are also important to consider. However, E7 and E6 experience that SSE sometimes cares too much about the wishes of associated companies. Likewise, E3 contradicts the financial stakeholders who question basic teachings and ministers who overemphasize what is needed in today's society: *"This is wrong because the reality is somewhere else when you graduate. Therefore, we must*

learn to deal with a changing world instead". Accordingly, E3 believes that most external expectations should be ignored while maintaining a strong relationship with the external environment to avoid becoming obsolete.

5.2.2. Interviews with Students

The students are quite unfamiliar with the internal goal of FREE: *"Is that an acronym for something?"* - S2. After the interviewers explain the meaning, most rather recognize it as an exploit for superficial legitimacy: *"I think the goal comes from the outside, to strengthen the reputation. They want to be a modern, forward-thinking, and innovative school."* - S1. Likewise, S4 does not believe that people feel FREE and thus repudiates its internal impact: *"The concept is rather for the school's own sake, they become significantly more attractive from an international perspective if they implement things like this."*

The external expectations of SSE, according to the students, will be discussed in 5.4.2.

5.3. The Brand Perspective

5.3.1. Interviews with Educators

The SSE brand is described as being identified with high quality: *"Employers know that SSE students usually have certain knowledge, it's part of the brand. You don't just have a degree, but an SSE degree."* - E4. Simultaneously, E6 emphasizes that one should be humble because the perceived superiority of the brand risks making people presumptuous.

It seems very important to continuously strengthen and uphold the brand's legitimacy and modernity. E5 says that the school organizes lots of events to understand what the business world values and E4 highlight the importance of considering the wishes of financial stakeholders: *"It's important to maintain an image. No educator talks explicitly about it, but those who finance the school control it. Their goal is that SSE shouldn't be like other schools, it should be leading."* This becomes evident, among other things, through which course areas SSE prioritizes to showcase: *"They have tried to make innovation a profile area. /.../ economics is currently the smallest department the school pursues."* - E2.

5.3.2. Interviews with Students

Students experience that SSE's brand gives them a guaranteed mark of quality: *"SSE is so much better from an external point of view than other schools. It gives you a "good student" mark."* - S3. This was particularly evident when S2 was offered a job without having applied or gone through any recruitment process: *"They don't care what we actually study /.../ just that I study at SSE. But good people study here, so hiring from SSE is rarely wrong."* Accordingly, many students find that they can deprioritize grades and deeper learning as long as they have SSE on their CV: *"Everyone knows that it's difficult to get enrolled, and even more difficult to pass. /.../ It becomes a unique selling point."* - S4.

5.4. The Culture Perspective

5.4.1. Interviews with Educators

SSE is influenced by a strong elitist culture: *"SSE is an elite school that should have a special place, create a certain type of leader."* - E4. The educators expect the students to be high performers and have ambitious goals: *"Students from other schools more often start as controllers or assistant auditors from a junior level. Our students want to become leaders."* - E5. Accordingly, the educators deliberately push the students harder: *"The students should take a step further and hire from other universities - not the other way around. /.../ Therefore, it's important to create reflective practices."* - E3.

The goal of FREE is seen as a top-down attempt at a planned culture, albeit with limited influence. Nevertheless, several educators believe that it sends the right signals: *"The message the top management level delivers to the lower levels plays an important role in the school's ethics"* - E5.

Few perceive the strong culture as a risk. E2 admits that strong cultures generally can become limiting but claims *"It hasn't happened here. I was worried for a while about some norm-critical exercises, isn't this a way to lower the ceiling instead of raising it?"* However, E4 proposes that the culture is partly infiltrated by unhealthy values: *"There are other important things in life than making money. But I've no opinion on that. It's up to those at the top"*.

The composition of educators differs depending on the course department. While some employ many international educators, others prefer Swedish educators. In the latter cases, educators express a strong identity with SSE that makes them stuck. Likewise, educators identify the students as a relatively homogeneous group, especially in terms

of gender, age, and geographic origin. E7 claims, however, that SSE tries to increase heterogeneity through increased internationalization and spreading awareness of the school's existence in Sweden.

5.4.2. Interviews with Students

“There is quite a strong culture, but it’s a good culture.” - S2. This statement is supported by almost all students with the addition that SSE is considered elitist. S3 believes that the elitism stems from the fact that certain prestigious families have studied at SSE. S4 thinks it corresponds well with the students' high performance: *“Everyone is driven and fights incredibly hard to pass both the courses and the social life.”*

The students feel that external actors, such as upper secondary schools, student applicants, and companies, have incorrect prejudices about SSE and its culture: *“People from the outside paint a very specific picture of SSE students. It must be okay to be an elite school.”* - S1. The prejudices presuppose, among other things, a competitive environment where SSE only trains managers, according to S2 and S4. However, the students oppose these preconceptions and rather describe a culture characterized by helpfulness and having fun: *“It’s a very helpful atmosphere. /.../ We have a “we’re in this together”-feeling”* - S4 and *“As long as you pass all the courses and have fun, you fit in”* - S2.

Lastly, SSE students seem to highly conform to each other: *“Someone joked on the first day that everyone will look the same in X years. And this was true. Now you have the same style of clothing, way of looking at the world, and reasoning.”* - S2. Similarly, social networking is considered important because it is believed to provide valuable contacts in the future. This makes students sometimes deprioritize education: *“You can study business and economics anywhere, you basically learn the same thing. But what sets SSE apart is the social network.”* - S3. To fully leverage this and to succeed in the future, social skills are highlighted as important to master: *“We’re basically trained to become managers so it’s a failure for society if we don’t have social skills.”* - S4.

6. Analysis

The analysis will first consider each selected FS perspective. Structure and Imitation focus on practical education whereas Brand and Culture on underlying assumptions and structures. Specifically, they will be analyzed through two dimensions. First, the three general warning signs: Lack of reflexivity, Lack of questioning, and Lack of substantive reasoning. Second, the specific perspective aspects that can generate FS. These are repeated from Appendix 1 under each respective heading in a table (Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8).

Thereafter, two other identified findings are analyzed and discussed: Differences between qualitative and quantitative courses and Personal interests affect reflective and critical thinking

6.1. The Perspectives of Functional Stupidity

6.1.1. Structure-generated stupidity

Table 5. Structure-generated stupidity

Functional Stupidity	Not Functional Stupidity
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The education is rigidly standardized- Rules and procedures overrule the core education and its purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The education changes when situations or circumstances require- Rules and procedures are adapted to the core education and its purpose

The educators' reprimanding of CRT students is either a way to ensure that all relevant material is presented or a functional attempt to avoid students asking overly complex questions. Regardless, Eisenhardt and Sull (2001) suggest that the formats overrule the core purpose of developing CRT students. This promotes FS by reducing the degree of reflexivity and substantial reasoning (Jackall, 1988) and limits students' motivational factor autonomy (Herzberg et al., 1959). Simultaneously, the students seem to be satisfied with neither having to prepare for nor be active during seminars. This reinforces that teachers' reprimands risk inhibiting reflexivity and substantive reasoning, as students functionally avoid it.

Moreover, the educators' partial adaptation of education, to satisfy the students, can be considered functional for the teacher to maintain legitimacy (Graeber, 2015). High course evaluations authorize them and their education. Vice versa, bad assessments can

tarnish their position. Educators are thus inclined to modify education if students are dissatisfied. Either this suggests reflexivity, adapting the dominant educational design, or a lack of substantial reasoning, adapting the design to reap short-term benefits (Jackall, 1988). In this case, the former is more likely because several educators emphasize only partial modifications because students often have insufficient knowledge to know best, which contradicts FS.

Lastly, educators' reluctance to change the examination method, despite testimony that it promotes memorization rather than CRT, indicates a strong trust in the system (Kjærgaard et al., 2011). Consequently, students deprioritize deeper understanding which contradicts SSE's strive to be FREE. The examination format thus overrules the educational ambition and its purpose (Heffernan, 2011), which supports the criticism (Dede, 2009) that current exam methods are too conventional to develop CRT. However, testing 300 students in a fair and efficient way requires some standardization, which to some extent legitimizes the choice. This supports the criticism (Silva, 2009) that soft skills cannot be tested in scalable ways and thus are meaningless in educational settings.

In sum, the structure-generated FS is judged to be moderate. Although prevailing structures reduce students' opportunities to demonstrate CRT, some are considered necessary to conduct an effective education.

6.1.2. Imitation-generated stupidity

Table 6. Imitation-generated stupidity

Functional Stupidity	Not Functional Stupidity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unreflectively go with the flow with the belief that it is the right thing - The organization focuses on satisfying external expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consciously following the herd to minimize the risk of various occurrences - The organization focuses on internal real goals and being unique

Although SSE already has a distinct university position as privately funded and the highest admission scores, it strives to strengthen the position by being unique. For example, instead of simply adopting the Higher Education Act as best practice, SSE adds FREE (Stockholm School of Economics, a) to distinguish itself. This implies that the organization focuses on internal goals (Giorgi & Weber, 2015) as well as both reflexivity and substantive reasoning (Jackall, 1988), which counters FS.

Simultaneously, FREE is rather unintegrated into education and can therefore instead be perceived as SSE merely presenting a facade of uniqueness to attract investors (Westphal et al., 1997). Likewise, by implementing the Reflection Series, SSE could legitimately claim to be encouraging CRT. But the interviewees' criticism of the addition rather indicates superficial changes that do not actually develop the students' CRT. This suggests a high focus on satisfying external expectations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), adding a pointless course to maintain its image as FREE, and thus FS. Nevertheless, there seems to be a degree of reflexivity (Jackall, 1988) behind the initiatives, which contradicts FS.

In sum, the extent of imitation-generated FS is considered low since the organization attempts to balance internal goals and satisfy external expectations, with a stronger focus on the former.

6.1.3. Brand-generated stupidity

Table 7. Brand-generated stupidity

Functional Stupidity	Not Functional Stupidity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The “right” brand is more important than quality - Important to uphold an external image of modernity and legitimacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality is more important than the “right” brand - More important what you actually do for work, rather than upholding an external image

SSE's brand is perceived externally as "right" as the high admission scores (Universitets- och hogskoleradet) and described difficulty to pass signal high quality. However, given that memorization is often prioritized over deeper learning, it suggests rather superficial knowledge and thus moderate to low quality. Hence, employers could demonstrate a prime example of brand-generated stupidity when they hire SSE students simply because of the brand (Assaf, 2009), regardless of their knowledge or skill level. Similarly, the increased self-esteem (Ottati et al., 2015) of having SSE on the CV risks making students presumptuous and thus falling into the trap of FS. Yet, most educators deliberately push the students harder in a quest for higher quality. This could somewhat offset the students' functional attempts to neglect deeper learning.

On the other hand, SSE seems to deprioritize core business and economic units for more modern ones to attract external stakeholders. The quality of students' basic knowledge thus risks deteriorating. Consequently, employers may eventually question the students'

competence and SSE's quality. It also risks undermining students' soft skills (Davies, 2018) such as CRT, which would affect the work of FREE. Accordingly, SSE's dependence on private funders allows the external image of legitimacy and modernity to overrule core education (Assaf, 2009). This suggests a power balance that results in brand-generated stupidity.

In sum, the extent of brand-generated stupidity is considered high. Although quality is considered important, it seems more important to maintain an external image of modernity and legitimacy.

6.1.4. Culture-generated stupidity

Table 8. Culture-generated stupidity

Functional Stupidity	Not Functional Stupidity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A strong culture from above rules - A shared belief in the group's uniqueness becomes an identity enhancer for the members - Conformist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The top culture shows direction but does not rule - Acknowledges the uniqueness but avoids becoming self-fixed - Non-conformist

The intended top-down culture of FREE shows direction but does not control the organization. Instead, SSE's brand and the attempt to satisfy financial providers strongly influence the culture. The perceived uniqueness of SSE reinforces a culture of elitism that assumes that SSE students are more likely to become successful leaders and important to society than students from other schools. This suggests a lack of reflexivity (Jackall, 1988) where the brand becomes identity-enhancing and makes the actors self-fixated (Miller et al., 1984). Similarly, SSE shows a lack of questioning and substantial reasoning (Jackall, 1988) when core business and economic education are de-prioritized to maintain modernity to conform to external stakeholders (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This results in culture-generated stupidity.

Moreover, the internal culture seems characterized by homogeneous thinking (Janis, 2008). Students quickly adapt to each other's mindset, thereby satisfying the dominant hygiene factor of belonging (Herzberg et al., 1959), and some course departments are reluctant to employ non-Swedes. Besides, all interviewees have an undoubtedly superior faith in SSE's uniqueness (Miller et al., 1984) which causes them to fail to identify potential risks with its strong culture. Accordingly, the internal culture seems to

make the actors “March to the same music without thinking about it” (Alvesson, 2015; Morris & Empson, 1998). This suggests a social environment influenced by deficient reflexivity, questioning, and factual reasoning (Jackall, 1988), which threatens the transfer of CRT from the classroom to real-world problems (Benander & Lightner, 2005).

In sum, the extent of culture-generated stupidity is considered high. There is a strong culture both from above and from within. The perceived uniqueness and homogeneity result in high conformity.

6.2. Other Findings

6.2.1. Differences Between Qualitative and Quantitative Courses

There appears to be a relationship between the nature of the course and the degree expressly given for CRT. While quantitative courses focus much on correct answers, qualitative courses are described as encouraging CRT. Nevertheless, the observations revealed that both rather reprimand students for frameworks and predetermined content. This risks fostering a lack of reflexivity and questioning (Jackall, 1988) among students where short-term memorization and absolute correctness become more important than long-term learning and trial-and-error (Benander & Lightner, 2005), justifying FS.

On the other hand, given that education should be fact-based (SFS 1992:1434; Stockholm School of Economics, a) and teach certain material, it may be difficult to increase CRT without compromising basic education in some courses. The Reflection series aimed to compensate for this, instead of increasing reflection in all courses. Yet it appears to fail to develop general CRT, supporting the criticism (Willingham, 2008) that the ability is not transferable across subjects.

6.2.2. Personal Interests Affect Reflective and Critical Thinking

Lastly, the interviews indicate a connection between interest in and degree of reflectivity. More frequently, those who expressed a desire for more CRT in education and showed higher reflectivity during the interviews also had an interest in CRT. This was either expressed explicitly or understood by their responses and requests for changes in education. Interest appears to be stronger among educators and students interested in qualitative, rather than quantitative courses, suggesting that it may be doomed to think that everyone wants to develop CRT.

7. Conclusion

7.1.Revisiting the Research Question

The business world and today's knowledge society (Dede, 2009; Mahmud & Wong, 2022; OECD, 2019) assess that CRT is required to meet future challenges. The Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434), therefore, claims that higher education should develop students' CRT. However, Alvesson & Spicer (2018) believe that most institutions suffer from FS, which rather counteracts CRT. This essay thus aimed to investigate the extent of FS found in higher education by answering the research question:

To what extent is Stockholm School of Economic's education influenced by Functional Stupidity, and why?

7.2.Answering the Research Question

The result shows that SSE's education is influenced by FS to a *moderate to a high extent* (Figure 4). It was recognized that practical education, analyzed from the perspectives of Structure and Imitation, allows a relatively high degree of reflexivity, questioning, and substantial reasoning. However, the underlying assumptions and structures, analyzed from the perspectives of Brand and Culture, inhibit these capabilities. Furthermore, other findings also indicate that qualitative courses encourage more CRT than quantitative courses and that personal interests can influence the degree of CRT.

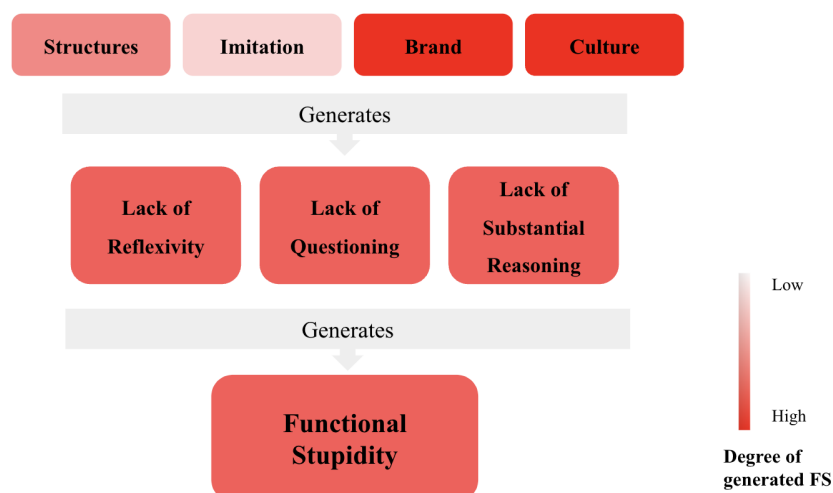


Figure 4. Result of the analysis

The primary explanatory factors for *why* the moderate to high extent of FS exists at SSE are Brand and Culturally generated FS. The prestigious SSE brand generates a perceived group uniqueness (Miller et al., 1984) and superior belief in the student's abilities. This spurs an elitist culture that becomes identity-enhancing and makes the actors self-fixated (Miller et al., 1984). In addition, the actors highly conform to each other and thus develop a groupthink (Janis, 2008) that results in a lack of reflectivity and questioning (Jackall, 1988). Likewise, to maintain and legitimize SSE's prestigious brand, the school is highly responsive to external stakeholders. It focuses specifically on financial providers which cause SSE to deprioritize core business and economic education for superficial modernity (Assaf, 2009).

The primary factors that reduce the extent and thus advocate only a moderate extent of FS are Structure and Imitation. Given that SSE is a fact-based educational institution (SFS 1992:1434; Stockholm School of Economics, a) with limited time and with large classes, it becomes difficult to avoid standardized approaches such as written tests and reprimands during seminars. Furthermore, SSE seems to strive for an idiosyncratic position (Giorgi & Weber, 2015), which justifies the experienced uniqueness.

8. Discussion

Returning to the discourse of the business world and society, the result indicates that students are at risk of not developing the CRT skills demanded by the 21st Framework (Dede, 2009), employers (Mahmud & Wong, 2022), and the OECD (2019). Consequently, they may struggle to deal with unknown and evolving circumstances responsibly, self-consciously, and effectively. Furthermore, if FS students also become future decision-makers, as SSE specifically strives for (Stockholm School of Economics, a), it affects not only themselves. As business managers, they threaten the company's development and profitability. As leaders in society, they can influence societal development and the prosperity of the population. For example, a leader who opposes unsustainable decisions has a greater opportunity to create good social development than a leader who lacks questioning and thus simply accepts top directives. Hence, the students' CRT ability can create negative or positive externalities.

Furthermore, in the discourse on higher education in Sweden, this thesis identifies a trade-off between desirable educated skills in accordance with the Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434). Regardless of the degree of FS in higher education, the teaching time seems too limited for the expected learning outcome to adequately educate both fact-based knowledge and CRT. Therefore, even if one tries to balance the ambitions, it is rather left to the educators to prioritize either or. Focusing on fact-based knowledge may be appropriate because it lays the foundation for CRT (Benander & Lightner, 2005; Willingham, 2008), and overemphasizing soft skills risks eroding core competencies (Davies, 2018). On the other hand, prioritizing the development and practice of CRT can improve the abilities' quality and real-world application (Benander & Lightner, 2005). It also decreases the risk of students suffering FS (Alvesson & Spicer, 2018), and thus that the above-mentioned consequences actually occur. Regardless of prioritization, higher education and above all educators find themselves in a pressing situation when two important educational ambitions are difficult to balance in a given time constraint.

8.1. Practical Implications

This thesis thus encourages a more comprehensive discussion within higher education about how to balance the ambitions of the Higher Education Act. Given that education is based on facts, perhaps the focus on CRT should be secondary. If not, the discourse should deliberate how much educators should integrate CRT into education. Rather than simply stipulating that CRT should be educated for example, perhaps an amendment

could guide educational institutions on how to achieve it and what factors work against it such as FS. Especially in quantitative courses which currently seem to limit the amount of available CRT. On the other hand, more guidelines and directives can simultaneously cause structure-generated FS that rather counteracts the motive.

Another example could therefore be to question whether and why certain ambitions should be achieved at all. The Higher Education Act was written 30 years ago, teaching time today is insufficient to reach all educational goals and society faces a challenging future. The Act should be amended accordingly. If the long-term ambition is CRT students and that cannot be achieved without fact-based knowledge, perhaps the scope of education needs to be narrowed. If, on the other hand, fact-based knowledge is seen as the primary goal of higher education, the focus on CRT should be downplayed. Regardless of measures taken, the higher education discourse should react because society expects them to develop students who can lead society.

Specifically for SSE, the result indicates that its reputation of quality risks being eroded if society and employers demand skills that it cannot provide. The prestigious brand then becomes useless for students to secure employment. Simultaneously, SSE's current work with FREE and the Reflection Series may gradually reduce the degree of FS and thereby counteract the expected implications. It would instead strengthen the quality reputation and make SSE a leading example of how to foster CRT students. However, such a conclusion would require a similar investigation in the future.

8.2.Theoretical Contributions

The thesis provided a new perspective on FS by studying an educational setting, filling a research gap. This makes it a more proven phenomenon and increases the number of available studies in the field (Åkesson, 2021; Borglin, 2019; Tidesten & Bodelind, 2019). Furthermore, it also demonstrated the dynamics between FS and CRT. By understanding how the concepts interact, discussed theories and literature can extend their concepts and conclusions. For example, rather than simply stating that CRT is important to develop, the 21st Framework (Dede, 2009) can also guide how to avoid creating a lack of questioning.

8.3.Suggestions for Further Research

The thesis recognizes several paths for further research. First, to increase the degree of generalization, similar studies could be conducted at other business schools in Sweden.

That would reveal whether the results apply specifically to SSE or generally in higher education. In the former case, perhaps the root cause lies in FREE or SSE's peculiar position, rather than higher education in general. Such findings would contradict our result and suggest further research on how private funding or perceived elitism affects the performance of an educational institution.

Second, given the discussion in 8.1, further research could examine the current relevance of the Higher Education Act. If the surrounding society and the Act prioritize different skills, students end up excelling in school but struggling in real life. Thus, further research can examine how the two perspectives can unify new guidelines to better benefit students.

Finally, conducting a similar study at SSE with more programs could expand the results. For example, including the BE year 3 and master programs makes it possible to investigate whether the degree of FS changes over time. That could reveal other influencing factors such as maturity level and time spent in the SSE culture. Similarly, a study of the Reflections Series and FREE over a longer period would reveal its true implications for CRT. Perhaps SSE has actually found a way for higher education to balance fact-based knowledge and CRT. Or have they even found an antidote to FS?

9. Appendix

Appendix 1. Explanation of what is considered Functional Stupidity and not

	Functional Stupidity	Not Functional Stupidity
Structure-generated stupidity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The education is rigidly standardized - Rules and procedures overrule the core education and its purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The education changes when situations or circumstances require - Rules and procedures are adapted to the core education and its purpose
Imitation-generated stupidity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unreflectively go with the flow with the belief that it is the right thing - The organization focuses on satisfying external expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consciously following the herd to minimize the risk of various occurrences - The organization focuses on internal real goals and being unique
Brand-generated stupidity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The “right” brand is more important than quality - Important to uphold an external image of modernity and legitimacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality is more important than the “right” brand - More important what you actually do for work, rather than upholding an external image
Culture-generated stupidity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A strong culture from above rules - A shared belief in the group's uniqueness becomes an identity enhancer for the members - Conformist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The top culture shows direction but does not rule - Acknowledges the uniqueness but avoids becoming self-fixed - Non-conformist

Appendix 2. Template for semi-structured interviews with seminar educators

General questions	<p>What is your goal as a teacher?</p> <p>What do you consider the goal of education for the students?</p> <p>Do you have a role model in education or in your learning?</p> <p>What does FREE, the acronym for SSE's educational mission, mean to you and how do you work with it? (Last asked question)</p>
Focus on the perspectives of Imitation and Brand	<p>Do you think there exist external expectations of SSE's education? Are these different from the expectations of other similar institutions?</p> <p>If so, do SSE adapt accordingly?</p> <p>Does SSE have a particular brand?</p> <p>If so, does SSE focus a lot on maintaining that image?</p>
Focus on the perspective of Structure and Imitation	<p>How has this seminar been planned and why?</p> <p>Are there any formal guidelines for how a seminar should be designed?</p> <p>Which has been involved in the planning? All seminar educators or only the course director?</p> <p>How do you test the student's knowledge? Why do you do it that way?</p>
Focus on the perspective of culture	<p>Could you or have anyone questioned the design of seminars or examinations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If yes - how is it received? - If no - why not? <p>Do you think that SSE is characterized by a certain culture?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If so, describe it. - If so, to what extent is SSE's education influenced by this culture? <p>Do you think it is positive or negative for a workplace to have a clear culture that all employees act and behave according to?</p> <p>Do you think that the students and/or educators at SSE are a heterogeneous or homogeneous group?</p>

Appendix 3. Template for semi-structured interviews with students

General questions	<p>What is your goal as a student in this education? What role model do you have in your education or career?</p> <p>What does FREE, the acronym for SSE's educational mission, mean to you and how much do the educators encourage it? (Last asked question)</p>
Focus on the perspectives of Imitation and Brand	<p>Why did you choose to study at SSE?</p> <p>Do you think there exist external expectations of SSE's education? Are these different from the expectations of other similar institutions? If so, do SSE adapt accordingly?</p>
Focus on the perspective of Structure and Imitation	<p>What do you expect from this seminar? Do you experience that you get what you expected?</p> <p>What do you think of the exam layout? Is it a fair way of testing your skills?</p> <p>How much free thinking do educators encourage?</p>
Focus on the perspective of culture	<p>Could you or have anyone questioned the design of seminars or examinations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If yes - how is it received? - If no - why not? <p>Do you think that SSE is characterized by a certain culture?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If so, describe it. - If so, to what extent is SSE's education influenced by this culture? <p>Do you think it is positive or negative for a workplace to have a clear culture that all employees act and behave according to?</p> <p>Do you think that the students and/or educators at SSE are a heterogeneous or homogeneous group?</p>

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