

Scholarship Spending in Slovenia: Aligning Purpose and Needs

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Abstract: This study investigates the purposes of scholarship spending in Slovenia, with a particular focus on state (public) scholarships and Zois (talent development) scholarships. It examines the fundamental objectives of scholarship provision, the structure of higher education indirect financing, and the characteristics of the Slovenian scholarship system, including eligibility criteria and scholarship types. A total of 87 higher education students participated in a survey designed to explore their scholarship spending patterns and assess whether these expenditures align with the intended purpose of the financial support as intended. The survey also examines students' attitudes toward scholarships, perceived fairness of the system, and differences in how scholarships are used—particularly regarding support for academic success and talent development. Findings indicate that scholarships are not always utilized as intended, many students perceive the system as unfair, and the current scholarship amounts are insufficient to meet students' needs in the context of the current socio-economic challenge. Based on these findings, the study proposes several recommendations for the improvement and more equitable development of the scholarship system in Slovenia.

Keywords: Scholarship; State scholarship; Zois scholarship; Spending; Talent development

1. Introduction

In a time of high inflation, when the cost of living is rising, every euro counts for everyday life. Students in particular, often face unstable funding, which can pose significant challenges to their academic progress and well-being. Financial instability or insufficient financial support is frequently associated with increased dropout rates (Skrbinjek et al. 2024). Financial aid policies therefore play a significant role in students' chances of enrolling, continuing and completing their studies (Vettoretto idr., 2023).

From an economic perspective, educational choices

are influenced by a range of structural parameters, including time preferences, borrowing constraints, expected returns to education, risk aversion, and individual preferences for learning (Cameron & Taber, 2004). Economic theory predicts that financial aid, by lowering the direct and indirect costs of education, increases educational attainment (Becker, 1993; Card, 1999; Cameron & Taber, 2004). Dynamic models that incorporate updated information and learning processes suggest that financial aid reduces the immediate cost of continuing education, thereby lowering the risk of dropout. However, it may simultaneously extend the



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time-to-completion, as students face less financial pressure to graduate quickly (Bettinger, 2004; Cameron & Heckman, 1998, 2001; Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999; Ehrenberg & Sherman, 1987).

parental education and student age emerge as key economic determinants in shaping how individuals respond to financial incentives in educational decision-making (Arendt, 2013). For example, students from families with lower parental education or income are more likely to be sensitive to financial aid, as these characteristics may reflect lower access to credit or fewer financial resources (Carneiro & Heckman, 2002; Cunha & Heckman, 2007). High parental education may indicate a strong intrinsic value placed on education, while low income may proxy liquidity constraints (Arendt, 2013). Furthermore, age and the year of study also contribute to variation in aid effectiveness: as students progress through their studies, the opportunity cost of staying in education (in terms of foregone earnings) tends to decline, but this cost generally rises with age. Thus, the effect of financial aid is expected to decrease with academic progression but increase with student age (Arendt, 2013).

To support students in their studies, it is essential to provide a stable environment that enables students to focus primarily on their academic responsibilities while also supporting their personal development (Student Organisation of Slovenia, 2010, p. 5). In this context, social transfers (such as access to student housing, subsidised meals vouchers, co-financed public transportation, healthcare services and scholarships) play an important role in fostering adequate living conditions and supporting students throughout their educational path.

The article focuses on the role of scholarships in the socio-economic lives of students and with a particular focus on the eligibility criteria, application procedures, and actual use of various scholarship types—especially state (government funded) and Zois (government funded talent development) scholarships. The study centres on students who are recipients of these two types of scholarship and explores how scholarships are perceived and used by students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Scholarships, along with other forms of social support, are critical instruments in enabling students to meet their basic needs and pursue their studies under stable conditions. However, the

allocation of scholarships and the effectiveness of this support system remain areas of ongoing public and academic debate.

A central concern of this study is how scholarships are actually spent. While the theoretical or declared purpose of scholarships is to support educational expenses—such as tuition fees, study materials, and living costs—students often use these funds to cover broader living needs. For some, scholarships provide essential financial relief, reduce dependence on parental support, and promote greater autonomy. For others, the funds may also be directed toward personal development, leisure activities, or talent cultivation (Mladina, 2021). This divergence between intended and actual usage raises questions about the alignment of policy goals with student realities and the efficient management of financial aid resources.

The aim of this paper is to explore the role of different types of scholarships within the broader socio-economic situation of students in Slovenia. The study focuses to reveal the perceived value of scholarships among students, their actual usage in everyday life, and the extent to which the current scholarship system in Slovenia aligns with the real needs of its recipients. Drawing on data collected through a survey of students receiving state and Zois scholarships, we analyse their experiences, spending patterns, and attitudes toward the scholarship system. Based on our findings, we propose recommendations for improving the design and implementation of the scholarship policies in Slovenia.

We set the following hypotheses:

H1: Recipients of the Zois scholarship predominantly allocate the funds toward activities related to talent development.

H2: More than 50% of students who were eligible for both the state and Zois scholarships chose to receive the state scholarship.

H3: Students who receive scholarships report fewer financial difficulties compared to those without any form of scholarship support.

H4: Students perceive state scholarships as a form of general support for educational expenses, whereas Zois scholarships as promotion of exceptional talent and the development of specific skills.

2. Literature Review

Policy frameworks and legislation ensures that

the state ensures that the higher education system functions effectively, equitably, and in accordance with international standards. Public funding supports higher education institutions in offering a diverse range of study programmes and provides students with various forms of financial assistance, including scholarships, grants, and subsidies for accommodation and meals. These measures help to lower financial barriers and promote more inclusive access to education (Bakwaph & Bodams, 2023). They are essential for integrating less privileged individuals into the educational system, as they enhance the likelihood of study attendance and persistence (Graves, 2023). Scholarship programs are designed to alleviate the financial burden and living expenses, thus allowing a larger demographic of students to pursue higher education. Moreover, the significance of scholarships extends beyond merely financial aspects; they foster a sense of belonging and motivation among students. Additionally, scholarship spending not only benefits individuals but also contributes to the broader economy by cultivating a well-educated workforce that meets the needs of industries (Wostner et al., 2023).

While access to higher education is relatively widespread across Europe, it remains neither unlimited nor completely free. This restricted access presents a significant societal challenge, as the lack of education or qualifications can exacerbate social and economic inequalities in modern democratic societies. Higher education, therefore, cannot universally be regarded as a public good equally accessible in all countries (Bergan, 2009, pp. 44–46). As noted by Zupančič (2020), there is a mismatch between the educational paths of students in Slovenia and the competency requirements of the economy, indicating a need for targeted financial support to ensure alignment with job market demands. Scholarships thus, can serve to attract students into fields that are critical for economic development.

Šušteršič, Skrbinjek, and Lesjak (2015, 17–52) state that scholarships are financial awards given to students to support educational activities or to help alleviate financial hardship. In most cases, they do not require repayment, making them a key form of financial assistance for many students. The exceptions are Personnel scholarships, which can also be repaid if not all obligations have been met. According to

Bergan (2009, p. 53), student support mechanisms represent a critical economic dimension of higher education policy. Although no universally accepted rules or agreements govern this domain, there is broad recognition of the state's public responsibility to ensure that higher education remains accessible to all qualified individuals. At its core, this principle asserts that no capable student should be excluded from higher education due to financial constraints. However, this also prompts a critical reflection on the notion of who qualifies as a „capable“ student: should eligibility be based solely on academic merit, or should it also take into account the socio-economic disparities that influence academic opportunities and outcomes? Focusing exclusively on merit may risk overlooking systemic inequalities that disadvantage certain groups of students.

2.1 Slovenian Higher Education System and Founding

The scholarship system in Slovenia is diverse and adapted to the different needs of students. It enables and facilitates studies for the socially disadvantaged, as well as encouraging talented students. It thus tends to widen access to education and enables the growth of human resources development. Almost 81,000 students were enrolled in tertiary education in Slovenia in the academic year 2023/2024. Of which, 71,056 students in higher education and 9,592 students in higher vocational education. The proportion of undergraduates in higher education is 55% of higher education students are enrolled in 1st cycle (undergraduate) programmes and the rest in 2nd cycle masters or 3rd cycle doctoral programmes. Although the number of students enrolled in tertiary education declined slightly each year between the academic years 2005/2006 and 2018/2019, the trend (with the exception of the COVID period) has reversed upwards again (SORS, 2024). In the academic year 2023/2024, almost three quarters of students were enrolled in full-time studies, while 25.4% of students were enrolled in part-time studies. In addition, 57.8% of students studying at tertiary level were women (SORS, 2024).

The Slovenian higher education system has witnessed significant changes in policy aimed at enhancing student accessibility. The economic crisis of 2008/2009, which severely impacted Europe, coincided with two major developments in Slovenia: the final implementation phase of the Bologna Process

within higher education institutions and the onset of a demographic decline in the number of young people eligible for tertiary education. These factors jointly contributed to a decrease in enrolments, which was followed by the implementation of austerity measures in 2012. As a result, the state's contribution to higher education declined progressively, reaching a historical low of less than 1% of Slovenia's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2015. In response to concerns over underfunding, the Higher Education Act (ZVis) was amended in 2016 to include Article 72b, which mandates that public funding for study activities must amount to at least 1% of GDP annually. The amendments also redefined the public funding structure for both public and concession-based private higher education institutions, introducing four-year contractual funding agreements. In addition, new Higher education act adopted in 2025 (Zvis-1,2025) provides that the funding for higher education will grow up to 1.5 GDP.

Scholarships in Slovenia can be financed from a variety of sources, including the state, businesses, employers, private foundations and educational institutions. Each of these sources may have specific objectives and criteria for awarding scholarships, e.g. the state provides scholarships to support low-income students, to promote specific fields of study and economic activity. Employers award scholarships to develop specific skills needed in their field. Scholarships serve a variety of purposes: from easing the financial burden to promoting academic excellence. All of these can have long-term positive effects on career prospects, self-confidence (recognition of achievements, monetary incentive for further development) and, of course, financial well-being. Scholarships are therefore more than just financial aid; they are a means to support personal growth and an incentive to pursue higher education (Hossler, Ziskin and Gross, 2009).

According to the Act on Scholarships (hereinafter referred to as the Act on Scholarships and Bursaries (ASB-1), 2023), the main purposes of scholarships are:

- Financial assistance in order to help reduce the financial burden of education (to help cover the cost of textbooks, accommodation, educational supplies and any school fees),
- Provide access to education (notably state grants, which provide access to higher education considering

social economic status),

- Promoting academic excellence and rewarding talent and effort (notably the Zois Scholarship, which is aimed at students with outstanding academic achievements),

- Promoting diversity and inclusion (scholarships for minority groups),

- Support career objectives (support specific areas of study or career paths, thus contributing to the development of professional fields in need of qualified professionals),

- Personal growth and development (boosting motivation and self-confidence),

- Attracting talented students (educational institutions or companies offer scholarships to attract talented and enthusiastic students).

Considering above purposes, the main types of scholarships are:

- Zois scholarship,
- State scholarship,
- Personnel scholarships,
- Scholarships for study in Slovenia for Slovenians living abroad,
- Ad futura scholarships and
- Scholarships for deficit professions.

Scholarships are awarded for the period from the date of award until the end of the educational programme. The State Scholarship, the Zois Scholarship and the Scholarship for Slovenians living abroad are awarded for a level of education higher than the level already achieved. Scholarships for deficit professions, Ad futura scholarships and co-financed personnel scholarships are awarded for a specific educational programme (ASB-1, 2023, Art. 9) Following the different types of scholarship, in addition we are focusing on presenting only on the most common scholarship types: Zois scholarship and state scholarship with statistical data.

2.1.1 Zois scholarship

This scholarship is intended for pupils, students and adult learners as an incentive to achieve outstanding results and thus create added value in the field of knowledge, research, development and the arts (JŠRIPS, n.p.). The specific eligibility condition is the demonstration of at least one outstanding achievement and, at the same time, have a good study grades (MDDSZ, n.p.).

The following are considered as outstanding

achievements (ZŠTIP-1, 2023, Art. 24):

- the top positions in knowledge at the national level in competitions of interest co-financed by public funds from the Ministry responsible for education,

- gold and silver awards in knowledge at the national level in competitions of interest co-financed by public funds from the Ministry responsible for education,

- prizes for the best research papers,

- participation in and top positions in international competitions in knowledge, research, development or the arts,

- an award-winning scientific research, development or artistic work at national or international level,

- publication of a scientific research thesis or scientific paper in a professional or scientific publication or

proceedings,

- a work of art or other work that has received at least two positive peer reviews published in various print media accessible throughout Slovenia, or has participated in an international exhibition or festival,

- top positions in vocational and professional education at national and international competitions.

In the academic year 2024/25, the amount of the Zois scholarship was EUR 148.15 per month for a pupil (EUR 296.29 per month if studying abroad) and EUR 172.84 per month for a student (EUR 345.68 per month if studying abroad). In addition, a residence allowance of EUR 98,76 per month and an allowance for scholars with special needs of EUR 61,73 per month may be granted (MDDSZ, n.d.).

Table1. Average number of recipients of the Zois scholarship by year and total spending

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of recipients</i>	<i>Pupils</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Average grant (euros)</i>	<i>Funds spent (1000 euros)</i>
2010	13.284	6.131	7.153	195	31,101.50
2011	11.908	5.687	6.221	208	29,668.24
2012	10.671	5.298	5.373	205	26,285.98
2013	9.547	4.992	4.555	169	19,353.53
2014	8.699	4.422	4.277	173	18,049.73
2015	7.424	4.383	3.041	166	14,775.86
2016	6.095	3.807	2.288	169	12,349.92
2017	5.304	3.405	1.899	166	10,563.27
2018	4.662	3.036	1.626	174	9,747.63
2019	4.896	3.226	1.670	162	9,514.02
2020	4.674	3.153	1.521	162	9,093.18

Source. Zoisova štipendija, b. l.

Table 1 shows data on the average number of recipients of the Zois scholarship (separately for students and pupils) awarded by JŠRIPS between 2010 and 2020. The average scholarship is expressed in euro, as are the total funds spent from the state budget (MDDSZ, n.d.). It can be observed that the number of students receiving a Zois scholarship has fallen drastically (by almost 80%). The funds spent have also fallen, from 31 million to just over 9 million euro. To be eligible for a Zois Scholarship, applicants must have achieved a minimum of 2.5 points in the Outstanding Achievement category in their upper secondary and first year of post-secondary or undergraduate studies (for the academic year 2023/2024). Students in the upper years of post-secondary and undergraduate studies and students in Masters programmes were

required to achieve 3.75 points in the Exceptional Achievement Test (JŠRIPS, n.d.).

At present, the Zois scholarship is not compatible with some other scholarships (neither the state scholarship, the Ad futura scholarship, nor the scholarship for Slovenians Abroad and Abroad). The Zois scholarship can be combined with the personnel scholarship (unless this does not allow it), the scholarship for deficit professions, and also with the Ad futura scholarship for study visits and for participation in knowledge or research competitions (JŠRIPS, n.d.).

2.1.2 State scholarship

The State Scholarship is intended for pupils and students in education who come from socially disadvantaged families (ASB-1, 2023, Art. 15). It promotes education and the attainment of a higher

level of education of the beneficiaries and establishes equal opportunities for education. They may be granted both for education and for education abroad in a publicly valid educational programme and educational institution (JŠRIPS, n.d.). The amount of the state

scholarship is based on the monthly income: to qualify for a state scholarship, the student's or household's income must not exceed €1,269.24 per person as of 1 March 2024. The conditions for receipt are verified by the competent social work centres (MDDSZ, n.p.).

Table2. Census for the National Scholarship

<i>Income bracket</i>	<i>Average monthly income per person (€)</i>	<i>Basic amount in euros for beneficiaries up to 18 years of age</i>	<i>Basic amount in euros for a beneficiary over 18 years of age</i>
1	up to 384,61	134,88	269,74
2	from 384,62 to 461,54	113,59	227,17
3	from 461,55 to 538,46	92,28	184,57
4	from 538,47 to 679,51	70,99	141,97
5	from 679,52 to 820,51	49,76	99,39
6	from 820,52 to 1.051,31	37,43	74,87
7	from 1.051,32 to 1.269,24	32,58	65,17

Source. *National scholarship*, n.d.

Table 2 shows that the range of the grant for students (beneficiaries over 18 years of age) is between €65.17 and €269.74 per month. In addition to the state scholarship, a residence allowance (€98.76 per month),

an allowance for scholars with special needs (€61.73 per month) and an achievement allowance may be granted (ASB-1, 2023, Art. 17-19).

Table3. Number of recipients of the State scholarship by year and total spending

<i>National scholarships</i>	<i>Number of recipients</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Average grant in euros</i>	<i>Funds spent (in 1000 euro)</i>
2010	38.691	23.708	14.983	159	73,738.91
2011	41.832	25.185	16.647	164	82,259.76
2012	28.858	10.211	18.647	196	68,045.64
2013	22.813	7.500	15.313	194	53,083.17
2014	35.480	20.491	14.989	154	65,465.67
2015	42.435	26.643	15.792	135	68,946.47
2016	44.562	28.739	15.823	129	69,102.95
2017	46.983	30.649	16.334	125	70,621.06
2018	46.361	30.932	15.429	122	67,876.43
2019	50.715	33.663	17.052	115	70,201.78
2020	53.438	35.145	18.293	112	71,753.30
2021	52.264	34.460	17.804	112	70,110.55

Table 3 shows that the number of beneficiaries increased significantly between 2010 and 2021, while the funds spent fell by just under €4 million. Given the increase in recipients, the average grant received has fallen by 30% (comparing 2010 and 2021), and by 43% compared to the highest grant received in 2012.

3. Methodology

The aim of this research was to investigate how

scholarships are used and perceived by students in Slovenia, with a focus on their socio-economic status and alignment with students' needs. A quantitative research design was employed, using a structured survey questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument with open and closed questions. This approach was selected because it allows the collection of original data and it compliments secondary analysis of statistical data while enables the identification of

trends and correlations (Tratnik, 2002, p. 47).

3.1 Data Collection

Data were collected using the online survey tool 1ka (<https://www.1ka.si/d/sl>) during May and June 2024. A non-probability snowball sampling technique was applied to reach the target population. However, the resulting sample is subject to several limitations. First, the use of snowball sampling introduces potential bias, as participants are likely to recruit individuals within their own social or academic circles, which may not reflect the broader population. Second, participation was voluntary and limited to individuals with familiarity with online tools, which may have excluded certain groups. Third, the demographic composition of the sample may not be representative of the entire student population, limiting the generalizability of the findings.

The survey was distributed via email and shared in various student-related Facebook groups and online study forums. Participants were encouraged to forward the questionnaire link to their peers to increase reach and enhance sample diversity. The target population included students enrolled in higher education institutions across Slovenia, with a focus on first- and second-cycle students, although third-cycle students were also represented. The final dataset consisted of 87 valid responses, after excluding incomplete entries due to missing values. Despite efforts to engage a broad and diverse population, a key limitation of the study was the high number of incomplete responses, which reduced the sample size and limited the generalizability of the results.

3.2 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics—including means, standard deviations, medians, and frequency distributions—to provide an overview

of respondents' demographic and educational characteristics, as well as their scholarship usage. To test the hypotheses, inferential statistical methods were applied, specifically non-parametric tests, to examine statistically significant differences between groups (e.g., based on scholarship type or financial status).

3.3 Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was pre-tested on a small group of students to ensure content validity, clarity of wording, and appropriateness of response categories. Questions were designed to align with the research objectives and reflect relevant constructs such as financial stability, scholarship usage, and perceived purpose. While internal consistency reliability (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) was not formally tested due to the limited number of scale-based items, the structured and standardized format of the questionnaire aimed to reduce variability and increase reliability. Final validation was conducted by a scholarship expert. However, the use of a non-random sampling method and a relatively small sample size ($N = 87$) limits the study's external validity. While the findings offer valuable insights into student experiences and perceptions, they should be interpreted with caution when attempting to generalize to the broader population of higher education students in Slovenia.

3.4 Sample Description

Among the 87 participants, 59 identified as female, 26 as male, while 2 did not disclose their gender. The majority (approx. 80%) were aged between 19 and 24 years, which is consistent with the typical age range for undergraduate (1st cycle) and early postgraduate students. The majority of respondents were enrolled in second-cycle (Master's) programmes (46%), followed by first-cycle (Bachelor's) programmes (41%), while 4% were pursuing third-cycle (Doctoral) studies.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the sample

<i>Category</i>	<i>Subcategory</i>	<i>Count (N)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Gender	Female	59	67.8%
	Male	26	29.9%
	Not disclosed	2	2.3%
Age Group	19–24	70	80.5%
	25–30	17	19.5%
Study Level	First-cycle (Bachelor's)	36	41.4%
	Second-cycle (Master's)	40	46.0%

Continuation Table:

<i>Category</i>	<i>Subcategory</i>	<i>Count (N)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Discipline</i>	Third-cycle (Doctoral)	4	4.6%
	Health and social security	14	16.1%
	Social sciences, journalism, info. science	12	13.8%
	Arts and humanities	10	11.5%
	Transport, security, hospitality, etc.	5	5.7%
	ICT	4	4.6%
<i>Institution</i>	Agriculture, forestry, etc.	2	2.3%
	University of Ljubljana	45	51.7%
	Independent HEIs	14	16.1%
	University of Maribor	12	13.8%
	University of Primorska	4	4.6%
	New University	1	1.1%

In terms of disciplinary distribution, the largest proportion of students were enrolled in health and social security (16%), followed by social sciences, journalism, and information science (14%), and arts and humanities (11%). The lowest representation was found in transport, security, hospitality and tourism, and personal services (6%), information and communication technologies (ICT) (5%), and agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and veterinary medicine (2%). The institution of study was also considered, as it may influence students' perspectives on scholarships due to variations in cost of living across Slovenian cities and institutional demands. Most respondents were enrolled at the University of Ljubljana (45 students), followed by independent higher education institutions (14 students), the University of Maribor (12 students), the University of Primorska (4 students), and the New University (1 student).

4. Results

We present the analysis of our survey step by step while providing answers to hypothesis stated. To begin, it was necessary to determine how many respondents were receiving any form of scholarship. Of the total

sample, 58% ($n = 45$) reported receiving a scholarship, while 42% ($n = 32$) were not receiving any financial support of this kind. A total of 13 respondents reported receiving a Zois scholarship. Due to the small sample size, we analysed this subgroup using descriptive statistics and comparative analysis, rather than inferential statistical methods.

To test Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Recipients of the Zois scholarship predominantly allocate the funds toward activities related to talent development*, hypothesis, we analysed responses to the question: "How do you use the scholarship?" Table 5 summarizes the responses of Zois scholarship holders regarding the purpose of their scholarship spending.

While the majority (54%) of Zois recipients indicated they primarily use the funds for study-related purposes, only 23% explicitly stated that they use the scholarship for talent development or personal growth. When including the two responses under "for all of the above," this share increases modestly. However, this still does not support H1, which assumed that talent development would be the primary use. Therefore, H1 is not supported by the data.

Table 5. Use of the Zois scholarship **How do you use the grant?**

<i>Frequency</i>		<i>Cumulative</i>
<i>I use it for study purposes (cost of study materials, transport, accommodation, food)</i>	7	54%
<i>Spend it on myself (e.g. talent development, personal growth)</i>	3	23%
<i>I contribute to the family budget</i>	1	8%
<i>For all of the above</i>	2	15%
<i>TOTAL</i>	13	100%

Hypothesis 2 examines students' preferences when eligible for both major types of financial support. *H2: More than 50% of students who were eligible for both the state and Zois scholarships chose to receive the state scholarship.*

Due to the relatively low number of applicable responses, only descriptive statistics can be reported. Out of 87 participants, only 2 students (2%) indicated that they were eligible for both scholarships. This alone is a noteworthy and somewhat concerning finding, suggesting that dual eligibility is extremely rare, possibly due to students' limited awareness of concurrent eligibility. Both students who were eligible for both scholarships opted for the state scholarship, citing the higher grant amount as the main reason. This aligns with broader survey results indicating that scholarship levels in Slovenia are widely perceived as insufficient to meet students' financial needs. Although the data support Hypothesis 2, the extremely small number

of relevant cases means the hypothesis can only be accepted with considerable caution.

To test hypothesis H3: *Students who receive scholarships report fewer financial difficulties compared to those without any form of scholarship support*, the data were first cleaned and assessed for normality. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used to determine whether the variable measuring financial difficulties followed a normal distribution. As shown in **Table 6**, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov statistic was 0.365 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a statistically significant deviation from normality ($p < 0.05$).

This result confirms that the distribution of financial difficulty scores does not conform to a normal distribution. In other words, the pattern of responses is significantly different from what would be expected under the assumption of normality, and thus non-parametric tests are more appropriate for further analysis.

Table 6. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

		OdgovorFinance
<i>Parameters</i>	<i>Sample</i>	60
	Average	1,4500
	SD	0,50169
<i>Absolute difference</i>		0,365
	Positive difference	0,365
	Negative difference	-0,314
<i>Test difference (K-S statistic value)</i>		0,365
<i>P-value (2-way)</i>		0,000

The hypothesis H3 was tested using the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test, which is appropriate when the assumption of normality is violated. The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that there is no significant difference in reported financial difficulties between students who receive scholarships and those who do not. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was adopted. If the resulting p-value is less than this threshold, the null hypothesis can be rejected, indicating that scholarship recipients and non-recipients differ significantly in terms of financial hardship. This approach allows for a robust comparison of the two independent groups despite the non-normal distribution of the data.

Table 7. Mann-Whitney U-test (H3)

<i>Test statistics</i>	
<i>Mann-Whitney U-test (U-statistic)</i>	331
<i>Wilcoxon W</i>	682
<i>Z (standardised value)</i>	-1,921
<i>P-value (2-way)</i>	0,055

The test yielded a p-value of 0.055, which is slightly above the conventional significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. While the result approaches statistical significance, it does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a significant difference in financial difficulties between scholarship recipients and non-

recipients. This outcome suggests that, based on the current sample, there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of financial difficulties. However, the marginal p-value implies that further investigation with a larger sample size or a reconsideration of the significance threshold might reveal more conclusive results.

To test the final H4: *Students perceive state scholarships as a form of general support for educational expenses, whereas Zois scholarships as promotion of exceptional talent and the development of specific skills*, we categorized respondents based on the type of scholarship they received—state scholarship or Zois scholarship. We then analyzed how recipients

reported using their scholarships: either primarily for general educational expenses or for the development of specific talents and skills. A contingency table was constructed to display the distribution of responses across both scholarship types and usage categories. To determine whether there is a statistically significant association between the type of scholarship and the purpose of its use, we applied the chi-square (χ^2) test of independence. The hypothesis was tested at a 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). This approach allows us to assess whether perceptions and usage of scholarships differ systematically between recipients of state and Zois scholarships.

Table 8. χ^2 test (H4)

	Value	The Difference	P-value (2-way)
Pearson's HI-squared	7,681	6	0,262
Odds ratio	6,536	6	0,366
Linear association	0,718	1	0,397
Number of values	34		

Table 8 presents the results of the chi-square (χ^2) test used to examine the association between the type of scholarship (state vs. Zois) and the reported use of the funds (general educational support vs. development of specific talents and skills).

As shown, the p-value for Pearson's chi-square test is 0.262, which is well above the 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that there is no statistically significant relationship between the type of scholarship received and the way the funds are used. This result suggests that scholarship holders do not differentiate between state and Zois scholarships in terms of how the money is spent. Contrary to the stated hypothesis, the recipients do not appear to use the funds in accordance with the intended purpose of each scholarship type. As such, Hypothesis 4 is not supported by the data.

5. Discussion

Despite the relatively small sample size, this study has nevertheless reached important conclusions. We find that recipients of the Zois scholarship appear not to be using it primarily for the talent development, which we find surprising given the scholarship's stated

purpose. In addition, there is a stigma in Slovenia that the Zois scholarships are awarded to highly academically committed students -those who would presumably invest more in skill development and talent enhancement. The second observation when students are eligible for both the state and Zois scholarships, they tend to choose the higher-valued option, which in this case is the state scholarship. This pragmatic decision underscores the importance of financial need over intended scholarship purpose. The third finding, the analysis found no statistically significant difference in financial difficulties between students with and without scholarships, although the result was borderline at the 5% significance level. This finding is understandable within the context of Slovenia's higher education system, where many students supplement their income through part-time student work, thereby alleviating financial pressures regardless of scholarship status. Finally, the overall findings support the broader conclusion that scholarships are not consistently used in alignment with their intended goals and purpose. This calls into question whether current scholarship structures and communication about their purpose effectively guide student behavior and spending.

According to the survey conducted on the use of

scholarships in Slovenia, the following improvements could be made to the scholarship system:

1. *Possibility of obtaining multiple scholarships simultaneously.* As of the academic year 2024/2025, students are allowed to receive more than one scholarship at a time. This change addresses previous unfairness, especially regarding state scholarships, which are primarily intended to support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Until now, such students had to choose between the state and Zois scholarship, often basing their decision solely on the amount offered. This approach did not necessarily reflect their actual needs or aspirations. The new regulation is a welcome measure, allowing academically successful yet financially disadvantaged students to receive greater support, devote more time to their studies, and engage in social and developmental activities. This change is expected to contribute to better academic outcomes and talent development, aligning with the core purpose of scholarships.

2. Another improvement could be to *excluding student work income from scholarship eligibility calculations*. Student work should not be included in the calculation of a student's or their family's income for scholarship eligibility. Students work hard to supplement their income and often support their families through this effort. Penalizing them with reduced scholarship amounts due to their initiative is counterproductive. This is especially problematic for state scholarships, which are sometimes used to sustain the family budget. Excluding income from student work would allow students to work without fear of losing financial aid, support long-term planning, and provide them with valuable work experience. It would also free up more time for studies and personal development.

3. In the light of the current socio-economic situation, consideration will need to be given to *adjusting the level of scholarships to reflect real costs*. We are aware that JSRIPS has a limited budget for scholarships, but at present, as the empirical results show, a single scholarship does not even cover the basic living costs of students, such as living expenses in the place of study. A re-analysis of the real estate market and living and study costs would be needed, and other living costs such as food, transport, study materials and personal hygiene would also need to be taken into account. A

more comprehensive re-analysis would allow a more realistic assessment of financial needs. On the basis of such analyses, it would then be possible to plan an annual increase in scholarships in line with the percentage increase in the Slovenian minimum wage. The minimum wage is a basic benchmark for covering the cost of living and thus provides basic financial security for workers, and we believe that the students' scholarship should do just that. This would relieve students of the worry of housing and social problems and, as a result, allow them to study and develop their talents without hindrance. Scholarships would therefore fulfil their economic and social perspective, i.e. they would enable students to study who would not be able to afford a scholarship if they did not receive one.

4. One of the key aspects of improving the scholarship system in Slovenia would be to have an *improved assessment of family financial situations*. This would help to eliminate inequities in the awarding of scholarships and ensure that funds are indeed given to those who need them most. As was evident from the students' responses, they themselves also noticed certain shortcomings in the awarding of scholarships. The most common of these were:

- *under-reporting income*: some families/scholarship holders deliberately mis-report their income in order to secure a scholarship. This has an impact on applicants who honestly declare their family's financial situation and are therefore left without the necessary support,

- *counting child support*: child support payments, which are meant for essential living needs, unfairly reduce the chance of receiving a scholarship., and

- *misrepresentation of household composition*: some applicants deliberately do not declare all household members in their grant application (e.g. they declare the family as a single-parent family), thus reducing the total income declared.

Although applications are considered on an individual basis, we believe that the criteria should also be adapted to specific cases. This would help to prevent unfair allocations and ensure that resources are targeted to those who need them most. It would also be possible to introduce stricter controls on applications, where the correctness and fairness of applications would be monitored. Inspections would also be involved to verify information with the competent authorities.

5. The most effective recommendation would probably

be to *collect feedback form students and auditors* on the scholarship system. For the scholarship system to continuously improve, it must include mechanisms for feedback from both students and administrative bodies. As Dermol (2013) notes, the guidelines and the system need to be continuously updated, and, of course, relevant data needs to be collected before that. In this case, a platform could be set up where scholarship holders could write their opinions on the system. In this way, feedback (experiences, suggestions and criticism) could be collected and shared anonymously or by students using their name. In addition to the open platform, a QR code with a link to a survey could be sent along with the scholarship award decision, where scholarship holders could express their views on the application experience, the scholarship process and their suggestions for improvement. In this way, new knowledge would be generated, disseminated within the student community and implicit in the scholarship processes. Getting feedback from students and auditors is crucial for the continuous improvement of the scholarship system and such an approach would ensure that scholarships fulfil their economic and social function and support students in their academic and personal development.

Completing higher education brings economic and social benefits not only for the individual, but also for society as a whole. Individuals who choose to study should therefore be supported. Investing in higher education is essential for the sustainable development and progress of society. The main benefits of higher education are (Šušteršič, Skrbinjek and Lesjak, 2015, p. 17-52):

- Increased employability and higher incomes.* graduates are more likely to be employed and earn higher wages than those with only a secondary education. This contributes to a better standard of living and a reduction in poverty,

- Economic growth:* educated individuals are more innovative and productive, which contributes to economic growth. Higher education institutions act as incubators for research, stimulating technological progress and economic development,

- Social cohesion:* higher education contributes to the development of a more informed, engaged and tolerant society. Education promotes critical thinking, democratic values and active citizenship,

- Health and quality of life:* better health outcomes, longer life expectancy and healthier lifestyle habits. Higher education also contributes to better mental health and personal satisfaction, and

- Reduction of social inequalities:* access to higher education is key to reducing social and economic inequalities. Through scholarships, grants and other forms of financial support, higher education institutions can help overcome barriers to study and provide equal opportunities for all ().

6. Conclusion

His article examined the role of ZoIs and state scholarships in the Republic of Slovenia. The primary purpose of scholarships is to provide financial support to students who meet specific eligibility criteria. They are intended to improve access to higher education, promote academic excellence, and support students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Scholarships fulfill multiple roles: economically, by alleviating educational costs; socially, by enabling participation for the less privileged; and educationally, by allowing recipients to dedicate more time to their studies, often leading to better academic performance. This study analysed responses from 87 students regarding how they use their scholarship funds. The findings suggest that scholarships are increasingly being used to meet students' personal needs rather than for their original purposes. Students tend to base their decisions primarily on the amount of financial support offered, and it is concerning that the number of scholarship recipients appears to be declining. These patterns highlight the need to critically review and re-evaluate the scholarship system in Slovenia. Two key challenges emerge: inequities in scholarship allocation, which call for a review of existing eligibility criteria and the incorporation of student feedback; and the inadequacy of current scholarship amounts in relation to rising living costs. Current scholarship levels are misaligned with economic conditions, including the national minimum wage, and do not reflect students' real financial needs. It is crucial to consider the views of both scholarship recipients and non-recipients, as well as those of advisors and policy makers, to ensure a more holistic and equitable approach. This study offers a valuable foundation for future research and policy development, aimed at strengthening the scholarship

system so it better fulfills its intended purpose—supporting student performance and contributing to the overall advancement of higher education in Slovenia.

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