

Looking into Bologna Process: The Role of Life Long Learning

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to review the dimensions of Bologna process and examine the significance of life-long learning to accomplish the quality circles under the umbrella of the higher education systems. This paper figured out the concepts of quality, development of bologna process, strategic planning, teamwork and life-long learning process by stressing the sustainable development of higher education within the framework set by the Bologna Accord. This essay can shed a light for the benefit of higher education institutions and education systems in Countries who elected to comply with the education accord laid down in Bologna, by reviewing their efforts through a harmonic picture on life-long learning in order to determine new students profile for the labour market.

Keywords: Life long learning, Higher Education, Bologna Process, Work Based Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Quality is referred as a collective destination of values, missions and visions within the institutions. It is a long term process that accompanies collective institutions' efforts within an intangible manner. Quality is concerned as representative to provide the achieved outcomes (Keeling *et al* 1998)

This concept becomes a vision of the higher education (HE) system, within information society, through the co-construction of knowledge, transferring knowledge based on student-centred education system. Higher education aim to educate people based on labour market demand in order to provide economic success of the single States through the quality of their education system. This quality relies on the diffusion of knowledge and on developing specific patterns of thinking, based on the demands of information societies (Bogfanel, 2001). In this respect, the education systems has evolved and so its learning environments, the teachers have changed their style adapting to the learners' needs. The most significant grounds of those changes rely on both theoretical evolutions plus structural organizational and practical reasons. Efforts to improve the quality of higher education

systems become a key focus. A diploma based on the labour market's need is almost a guarantee of an employment (Rich, 2010).

The quality assurance justifies any decision on innovation, research, analysis and evaluation of teaching and learning processes, organization and management of educative centres, conferences, scientific and professional meetings, congresses, etc within the higher education framework. It is a duty of the higher education systems to make evident works in order to attain quality (Abari, Yarmohammadianb, Esteki, 2011).

Quality management becomes therefore an umbrella for higher education systems which aim to graduate people based on the workforces needs within the harmony of basic skills (Hidalgo, Villoria, Romero-Cerezo, 2001). Graduates become key actors in the society and in the economy market, thus gaining in today's market major opportunity thanks to the efforts of the harmonization of higher education systems. Higher education systems become therefore strategic and play a great role in resolving socio-economic problems in this fierce competitive global economy. The quality value is taken in account to establish the organizational culture of learning in education and research. In this respect the students' needs, new learning systems, technology and environment, need to be closely considered and scrutinised in an effort to improve the quality of higher education system (Gibbs, Armsby, 2010).

To achieve quality in higher education it is consequently necessary to concentrate in strategic plans, which include increasing access to education, create and nurture mobility and international networking, develop new research policies, information, technology and production (Bogfanel, 2001). As a result, participatory governance of higher education systems, industry-university collaborations, life-long learning and strategy, would provide a road for success in higher education systems. A key factor in improving quality in the education and learning process is the ability to be an effective manager using the information flow in a bi-directional way, and thus gain human capital.

Development of Bologna Process

The Bologna Process has reformed higher education in order to fulfil the requirements of the 21st century society. Bologna Process stressed the academic autonomy and freedom, as the new forms of social responsibility regarding to life-long learning. This process facilitates students' awareness to the needs of the society by gaining basic skills based on labour market needs (Rich, 2010).

In this respect, there is rapid change in higher education systems based on tangible quality value. These changes covered the efforts in internationalization, diversity, ICT revolutions, increased competition and collaboration, and new teaching and financing methods (Sangster, Maclaran, Marshall, 2001).

Bologna Process is the creation of the European Higher Education Area by standardise [academic degrees](#) and quality assurance benchmarks, consistently throughout Europe, in particular under the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

The Bologna Process aims to facilitate mobility by providing common tools (such as a European Credit Transfer and accumulation System – ECTS and the Diploma Supplement) to ensure that periods of study abroad are recognized in the different European countries. These tools are used to promote transparency in the emerging European Higher Education Area by allowing degree programmes and qualifications awarded in one country to be understood in another (Rezaev, 2010).

Two basic degrees, Bachelor and Master, have been adopted now by every participating country. European universities are currently in the implementation phase, and an increasing number of graduates have now been awarded these new degrees. Typically, a Bachelor degree requires 180-240 ECTS credits and a Master programme between 90-120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 ECTS at Master level. This allows for a flexible approach in defining the length of both Bachelor and Master programmes.

Many participating countries have made substantial changes to their systems in response to the Bologna Process. Introducing the new degrees has required a tremendous effort in reviewing curricula and expectations toward students. Already over half of European universities have reviewed their curricula entirely, using the Bologna reforms to implement a more student-focused approach and new quality procedures. In the third cycle, European PhD programmes are not defined by ECTS credits, however common principles are currently under discussion.

As we are living in technology driven and knowledge-based societies, there is an intensified need to adapt our needs to the Bologna process. This process provides an angle to create new student profile whose are from different ages, cultures, etc. by having worldwide skills to gain a success within the labour market (Rich, 2010). Therefore, European countries have started to consider and implement the Bologna declarations within their education systems. The Bologna Declaration is a guarantee by 29 countries to

reform the structures of their higher education systems. Bologna process is aimed to make convergence among higher education systems. Turkey, Italy, Spain are some examples that they have started declarations of Bologna process.

As Bologna process relies on unity of higher education systems, most of the countries faced with obstacles to be adapted to this process. Therefore, strategic planning plays a great role to resolve these obstacles.

Strategic Planning and Team Collaboration

Strategy is referred as an overall approach that organizations or institutions take overall approach on the understanding of the broader context. This overall approach can be gathered from strengths and weaknesses, and the problem that organizations and institutions try to address. In this respect, strategy provides a framework within which to work, it clarifies what you are trying to achieve. Therefore, in higher education systems, to be a part of Bologna process requires strategic planning in order to review curricula and expectations and education structures and services.

As strategic planning is the core of the work of institutions, it is a way of making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy. Strategic planning is beneficial when:

- It is needed to plan strategically as well as operationally and to make a distinction between the two.
- Some ideas are needed to plan a strategic planning process.
- It began the planning for a new project or organization.
- A review of a strategic framework is needed.

Strategic planning provides a big picture of what institutions are doing and where institutions are going by giving clarity about what institutions actually want to achieve and how to go about achieving it, rather than a plan of action for day to-day operations. By this way, it enables institutions to answer the following questions:

- Who are we?
- What capacity do we have/what can we do?
- What problems are we addressing?
- What difference do we want to make?
- Which critical issues must we respond to?
- Where should we allocate our resources?/what should our priorities be?
- What should our immediate objective be?
- How should we organize ourselves to achieve this objective?
- Who will do what when?

With regards to the diagram here below, and to the questions above, it is significant to realize the importance of collaboration and teamwork within strategic planning process and implementation in order to attain qualified works.

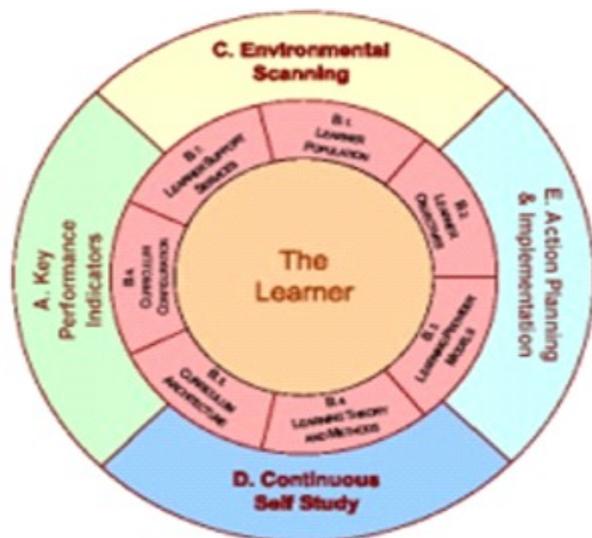


Fig.1 (TEAM WORK IN STRATEGIC PLANNING)

Well-integrated collaborative platforms and coordination mechanisms are critical to achieve interdependent tasks and to accomplish specific goals. They provide adoption of coordination mechanisms from a wide array of information, communication technologies, and collaboration effectiveness among innovation teams in order to clarify the needs of higher education systems.

In today globalised business environment, higher education systems have to develop and introduce innovation, enhanced products with great complexity for the new students' profile. There is an intensified need to respond rapidly to the changes and to the labour market requirements. Therefore, adequacy of consensus within innovation complexities and cross-functional collaboration based on teamwork in the strategic planning play a great role within the adoption of Bologna process (Ko, To, Zhang, Ngai, Chan, 2011).

It is now time for action, based on shared values and team collaboration among institutions through strategic plans. Based on quality framework, each university should develop strategic planning for action and standardization based on the Bologna process.

Life Long Learning

As higher education institutions tend to make major transformations for the knowledge economy, direction to the changes for efficiency within competitive forces, bridging the gap between higher education and the public, private and voluntary sectors is crucial. Shifting to deliver skills within global and competitive sense through higher education practices provides opportunities to implement pragmatism of the marketplace (Gibbs, Armsby, 2010).

Due to many changes, the higher education sector increases in innovative curriculum developments that makes the rationale stance of life-long learning perspective (Miao, Hoppe, 2011). Innovation in teaching and learning in general becomes keys to consider new student profile in higher education. Bologna process supports the harmonisation of higher education where mobility is experienced, in order to share common perspectives. In this respect, accepting the perspective of life-long learning make positive trend in education (Keeling, Jones, Botterill, GrayColin, 1998). Therefore, learning for work, learning at work, learning through work is a new approach to be considered to diffuse life learning perspective within quality implementation (Lester, Costley, 2010).

To reach out the notion of sustainable development in the quality circles, higher education institutions, establishing standards of life-long learning for new student profile provides to supply the demands of labour market (Taylor, Nathan, Coll, 2003). Learning at a distance and integration of information technology to the education within life-long perspective facilitates translating theory into practice within knowledge transformation for the development of a far higher level of lifelong learning capabilities among new student profiles at HE institutions (Sangster, Maclaran, and Marshall, 2001).

Although there are efforts to reach out life-long learning process, this process and quality assurance are the weak circles of the current situation of the higher education institutions. In this respect, there is intensified need to concentrate on life-long learning concept and its internalization in practice. Facilitating experienced and skilled individuals in higher education institutions, fostering applications of theories in education systems are not satisfied and fully integrated to the curriculum of higher education systems in European countries (Yongwu, Heinz, 2011).

Active participation of the learners (to the administration of the universities and active learners within class), service to the society with researches, distance learning applications, flexible learning programmes are the fundamental success factors to practice life-long learning philosophy that the Bologna process emphasis.

Considering Bologna process of European countries, life-long learning process and quality assurance are the weak circles of the in the current situation of the higher education institutions. There is intensified need to concentrate on life-long learning process and its internalization in the practice.

Conclusion

The Bologna declaration was signed by 29 countries which "undertake to attain the Declaration's objectives" and to that end "engage in coordinating policies".

It is a commitment freely taken by each signatory country to restructure their higher education system based on European level. The Bologna process aims at creating convergence rather than "standardisation" or

“uniformisation” of European higher education within the autonomy and diversity.

The so-called Bologna Process or Bologna Accord, is the name of a treaty for the creation of the European Higher Education Area, with the aim to assure quality standards for academic degrees throughout Europe. The convention is named after the University of Bologna, probably one of the most ancient Universities in Europe which was established in 1088, the place where the Education Ministers from 29 European Countries signed the original treaty in 1999.

It is a common misconception that the Bologna Process is merely an European initiative, but in reality the participating countries are 47 with only 27 member states of the EU (Rich, 2010).

The core component of the Bologna process is the advancement of knowledge through original research based on the European Higher Education Area, as agreed by Ministers in Bergen in 2005 (EUA 2007)

The descriptors set out in the Framework for Qualification of the European Higher Education area are widely used in a national level, in order to assure quality at Higher Education Institute among the States participating in the Bologna Process.

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