

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This article on Human Resource Management and the Bologna Process: A Conceptual Overview, is aimed at reviewing the entire process from the Sorbonne Declaration to the present-day realities within the European Higher Education Area and as it relates to human resource Management Education and practice. The study analyzed three Bologna nations judgmentally selected: Spain, France, and Uzbekistan. Based on the analysis, it was found that most of the targeted goals of the promoters of the Bologna process have not been achieved but have led to a wide range of reforms to improve their higher education systems. It was also observed that some Bologna nations have their national versions of the Bologna process. The syndrome of old and new systems co-existing was also observed. Also, the quality of Human Resource Management graduates has improved under the Bologna process. It was recommended that the implementation of the Bologna process should take cognizance of national peculiarities. The Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), should be replaced with an international secretariat headed by a director –General, for greater success of the Bologna Declaration.

Key Words: *Bologna process, Sorbonne Declaration, National Versions, Erasmus + mobility, Diploma Supplement, Internationalization.*

INTRODUCTION

In 1998, four nations, represented by their ministers, came together to create a common frame of reference within the European Higher Education Area. (EHEA) These nations included France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy. It culminated in the signing of the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998. However, in 1999, about 29 countries reviewed the Sorbonne Declaration and instituted the Bologna Declaration. Today we have about 49 nations that have identified with the Bologna process. The Author thought it imperative to undertake a conceptual overview of this new thinking within the European Higher Education Area More so, as it relates to Human Resource Management (Education and practice)

THE SORBONNE DECLARATION:

The Sorbonne Declaration was the move that gave rise to the Bologna process. It was signed in 1998 in Paris, by the ministers of four countries, namely France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy, committing them to harmonizing the architecture of the European Higher Education system. The declaration aimed to create a common frame of reference within the intended European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and for the teaching staff. Also, it was meant to ensure the promotion of qualifications, with regard to the job market.

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

In Bologna, in 1999, as a follow-up to the Sorbonne Declaration of 1998 in Paris, the ministers of education of 29 countries agreed on a common vision of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). They found that this vision was politically relevant for their own countries and translated it into the operational goals listed in the Bologna Declaration. The EHEA's purpose was to ensure that academic degree and quality assurance standards are comparable and compatible throughout Europe.

The Bologna Process was to take full effect from 2010. However, some nations were ahead of this date, and this included Italy (1999), Austria (2000), Estonia (2002), Croatia (2005), Serbia (2005), and Hungary (2006). Other nations have implemented the policy at various times, including Belgium, Denmark, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Finland.

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF EHEA:

The Key Elements of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) envisaged at that time, were:

- European Countries with different political cultural and academic traditions would engage in cooperation to reach a shared objective.
- European students and graduates would be able to move easily from one country to another with full recognition of qualifications and periods of study and access to the European Labour market.
- European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) would be able to cooperate and exchange students/staff on the bases of trust and confidence, transparency, and quality.
- European governments would fit their national higher education reforms into a broader European context.
- Higher Education (HE) in the European region would increase its international competitiveness, as well as enter into dialogue and improve cooperation with HE in other regions of the world.

THE MAIN PILLARS OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (EHEA):

Through voluntary convergence and an inter-governmental approach, the following main pillars of the European Higher Education Area were constructed:

- A common framework: A common credit system (ECTS) within three cycles (Bachelors, 3 years of 180-240 ECTS; Masters, 2 years of 90-120 ECTS; Doctorate, 3 years without ECTS range given), common principles for the development of student-centered learning, the European Standard and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, a Common Register of QA Agencies, a Common Body to methodologies and Sustainable achievements were produced by European HEIS.
- A number of common Tools: This includes the ECTS users' Guide, the Diploma Supplement, and the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

HOW DOES THE BOLOGNA PROCESS WORK?

The Bologna Process is currently being implemented in 49 states (EHEA), across Europe. Every 2 or 3 years, there are ministerial conferences organized in order to assess the progress made within the EHEA and to decide on the new steps to be taken.

The Bologna follow-up group (BFUG), is the executive structure supporting the Bologna process in between the ministerial conferences. It has been in place since the autumn of 1999. The work of the BFUG is overseen by a Board, in a hosting nation. Albania is the hosting nation for June 2024 ministerial conference.

Bologna Process: The Experience Dimension

The Bologna Process attracts opportunities and mobility for students and staff within Europe and other areas of the world. It affords internships across EHEA and ERASMUS + mobility programmes to facilitate greater mobility so that students are able to acquire the skills employers are looking for, such as cultural maturity.

The internationalization in the Bologna Process results in the development of integrated study programmes that snowballs into making friends and having lasting memories that will last a lifetime.

Another dimension is the staff mobility schemes and calls for participation. We have the Bologna Thematic Peer Group (TPG) on quality assurance for staff members involved in quality assurance.

The scheme is funded by the Implementation and Innovation in quality assurance through peer learning project (IMINQA), and ENQA is a Partner. So, in a large measure, Bologna Process fosters employability within the European Higher Education Space.

CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: A STUDY OF SPAIN, FRANCE, AND UZBEKISTAN

The challenges associated with the implementation of the Bologna Process, are many and varied. From a general perspective, these challenges include unsuitable university infrastructure and the effect on existing academic calendars. Also, there is the challenge of the implementation of the Bologna Process with regard to the European credit transfer system (ECTS). The complexity requires conferences, workshops, and seminars to clarify. Some nations would require more preparation and effort to implement the Bologna Process.

Notwithstanding these general challenges, some nations have their unique challenges in the implementation of the Bologna Process. However, it is not practicable to conduct a study on all 49 countries inclined to the Bologna Process. So, three countries selected judgmentally were considered. These include Spain, France, and Uzbekistan

SPAIN:

The observation on Spain's implementation of the Bologna Process has been highlighted below:

- University leaders are warning that government funding cuts and inflexible policies are distorting Spain's attempt to implement the Bologna Treaty,

which seeks to set common academic standards and encourage greater student and staff mobility across Europe.

- There is what is popularly labeled "Spanish style implementation"
- There is the enforcement of degree durations and cultural differences.
- Spain does not have a culture that supports endowments or donations to fund research, like the United Kingdom. Fiscal laws are against it.
- Posts of Associate Lecturers are not being renewed.
- Universities are spending more time searching for alternative funding sources
- Many researchers lack the communication skills to work abroad, consequent upon Spain's traditionally theoretical method of teaching languages.
- In Spain, we have strong catholic family ties and a lack of state support. The effect is that it is unusual for young people to study elsewhere.
- In Spain, more young people continue their studies due to the high level of youth unemployment.

FRANCE:

The implementation of the Bologna Process in France is in highlights:

- The Reform has benefited the students. The number of dropouts has declined by 10 -20%, and the promotion rate has increased from 70 - 80%.
- An Article published in a newspaper in France (Le monde), stated that "the harmonization of Diplomas in Europe is applauded by French Universities."
- It is to be noted that the reform process has achieved none of the underlying objectives sought by its initial promoters. The majority of University departments have simply changed the names of their diplomas but not their content. Most professors have reintroduced existing courses in the new architecture, but there is no real attempt to improve current practices. The

system is more or less the same as before, and one can hardly anticipate a new dynamism in the system for achieving the ambitions set up by its promoters.

UZBEKISTAN

The observable implementation of the Bologna Process has been, highlighted below:

- In Uzbekistan a Diploma Supplement for graduates of higher education institutions is not correspond to the Diploma Supplement in the higher education system of Bologna countries. It is only in the state language (the Uzbek language). The students face difficulties if they want to continue their studies in foreign countries. To study abroad, students need to translate their Diploma Supplement and also confirm it. This takes time and a lot of expenses. To solve this problem, it is important to adapt the Diploma Supplement to foreign standards and introduce the English version of the Diploma Supplement.
- In Uzbekistan, Bachelor is 4 years, master's (two levels). The main specialty is 1 year and the scientific pedagogical specialty is 2 years. The doctorate-level reforms result in Ph.D. and D.Sc degrees. These reforms are not in sympathy with the three-cycle of 3-2-3, recommended in the Berlin conference of 2003.

PROS AND CONS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The Bologna process has a number of benefits. It provides better and more attractive opportunities and mobility for students and staff within Europe and other areas of the world. It also ensures educational compatibility in higher education. Those involved in the Bologna process work as partners, resulting in higher demand for education programmes.

In fact, after the signing of the Bologna Agreement, it was easier to attract international students to many European countries, and as a result, the number of students going to European Universities increased after the Agreement. Regarding the language of study in these countries, in addition to the official language of the country, there must also be English. The Bologna process caused the circulation of top student talents in these countries, instead of a brain drain.

Notwithstanding the benefits associated with the Bolognas Process, there are some drawbacks. The most noticeable drawback is the fact that old and new systems co-exist and some not so harmoniously. Also, new compressed versions of courses may not provide enough time for assimilation, reflection, and quality learning. To the Bologna Agreement, it has been observed that there is lower demand for health programmes. It must also be appreciated that implantation at the country level, can have a huge, impact on success.

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND THE BOLOGNA PROCESS:

The Bologna Process has impacted Human Resource Management as a discipline. From the perspectives of human resource management education and human resource management practices; the bologna declaration has impacted the profession.

According to the Bologna Process, University education must be done at three levels or cycles (Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate). This applies to human resource management education. So, we have bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees in human resource management within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The duration is Bachelor's (3 years), and Master's (2 Years). And Doctorate (3 years) from the angle of human resources management practice, the Bologna Process has helped in providing or

facilitating greater mobility so that students are able to acquire the skills employers are looking for, such as cultural maturity. In fact, the Bologna Process caused the circulation of top student talents across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), resulting in a higher number of highly skilled and employable graduates and university staff. The Erasmus + programmes have enhanced the quality of university graduates with the hands-on experience needed in the job market, making industries and employers better off as we do not have the brain drain syndrome.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study observed a number of issues that should be stated as clearly as possible:

- While most of the targeted goals have not been achieved, many European countries have implemented a wide range of reforms to improve their higher education systems.
- The Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 and was to take full effect in 2010. However, some Bologna nations were slow in the implementation of the Bologna Process, notably Uzbekistan. It was in 2018, that the president of Uzbekistan, ShevkatMirziyoev, denominated the higher education of the country as overdue in the meeting on higher education. But Italy adopted the policy in 2005.
- About 20 more nations, apart from those that signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999, have identified with the Bologna Process, bringing Bologna countries to about 49.
- Apart from the “national versions” of the Diploma Supplement, there is a “unique” implementation of the Bologna Process, which can best be described as a “national version of the Bologna Process.

- Rather than increase budgets for universities, some nations embarked on drastic budget cuts. Thus, working at cross-purposes with the Bologna Declaration.
- Unsuitable university infrastructure and academic calendar has been identified as one major challenge in the implementation of the Bologna Process.
- Another major challenge in implementing the Bologna Process is related to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Several conferences, workshops, and seminars were organized to clarify the Process.
- To ensure effective monitoring and control, the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), was instituted as the executive structure supporting the Process in-between ministerial conferences.
- It was observed that the main principles of the Bologna Process are the Diploma Supplement, the European Credit Transfers System (ECTS), the Three-Tier Cycle of Higher Education, Academic Mobility, and Quality Assurance.
- A major benefit of the Bologna Process is the mobility of students, graduates, and university staff across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In fact, Erasmus + Programmes are very popular in relation to mobility under the Bologna Process
- A noticeable drawback to the Bologna Process is the fact that old and new systems co-exist, and some not so harmoniously.
- The quality of University graduates specializing in human resource management has improved under the Bologna Declaration.

DISCUSSIONS:

It must be emphasized from the onset that the Sorbonne Declaration and subsequently the Bologna Declaration, was to ensure that academic degree standards and quality assurance standards are more comparable and compatible throughout Europe. The promoters gave about ten years before full implementation. Some countries were quick while some were slow in the implementation. Some of the Bologna nations have their own versions of the Bologna Process, and running counter to the key objectives set out by its promoters. Overall, however, Europe's higher education architecture has witnessed a wide range of reforms, making the EHEA a better place.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

This article recommends, against the research findings, the following:

- That Bologna nation should play down on their national versions of the Bologna Process and be more honest and pragmatic in the implementation of the Bologna Process.
- In the Light of national peculiarities, implementation of the Bologna Process should be in phases and recognize resistance from national governments and university leaders from the perspectives of funding and infrastructural developments, language, and communication barriers, among others.
- The “mobile secretariat” of the Bologna Process, i.e. the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), should be replaced by an international secretariat with a director-general at the helm of affairs and located in a country “democratically” selected by Bologna Nations in a ministerial conference. This way, it will have durable programmes and achieve greater success.
- Bologna nations should be ranked according to the level of compliance with the Bologna Declaration and Bologna nations should be allowed to implement the policy in line with current national realities and in phases.

This strategy will encourage active and realistic participation in the Bologna Process. The old system will gradually give way to the new system, instead of co-existing.

CONCLUSION:

The most important goal of today's higher education institutions under the Bologna process is to learn professional standards and employers' requirements and to re-examine and regularly update curricula in the field of higher education based on market demand.

It is expected that the Bologna Declaration should lead universities to review their courses and respond to the economic and social needs of society.

In the final analysis, the implementation of the Bologna process should be providing students with a more personalized service that includes more professors and smaller class sizes.

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