QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Albena Gayef[1], Canan Hurdag[2]

[1]Istanbul Bilim University School of Medicine Department of Medical Education and Informatics, Buyukdere Cad.No:120 Sisli-Istanbul, Turkey

[2]Istanbul Bilim University School of Medicine Department of Histology and Embryology Buyukdere Cad.No:120 Sisli-Istanbul, Turkey

Abstract
Higher education is expected to meet a wide range of needs for evolving knowledge societies: educating larger numbers of the population, creating new opportunities for students, developing research and innovation, responding to local and regional needs and acting to improve quality and efficiency in all aspects of the higher education. The number of students and institutions has been increasing both nationally and globally. It is essential to focus and increase the quality of educational programs in higher education. The European Union has been developing policies in order to increase the quality of education. The Bologna Process has been one of the important development for increasing the quality in higher education. The aim of this paper is to describe and discuss the quality assurance of the Bologna Process policies in higher education and its application in the Turkish educational system. Higher education institutions should plan and implement their quality management processes and curriculum planning within the scope of the Bologna Process.

Key words: *Quality Assurance, Bologna Process, Higher Education, Turkey*

1. INTRODUCTION

The past 12 years have seen unprecedented developments in higher education, both in Europe and across the world. The range of societal demands on higher education has expanded rapidly. Higher education is now expected to meet a wide range of needs for evolving knowledge societies and economies: educating ever-larger numbers of the population, creating new opportunities for non-traditional students, developing research and innovation, responding to local and regional economic challenges, and acting to improve quality and eficiency in all aspects of the higher education mission. Higher education is at the centre of the global transformation from an industrialized to a post-industrial knowledge society. In this emerging globally connected knowledge society, higher education is no longer on the margins of social and political reality, in the traditional realm of comfortable ivory towers. Rather, it has been brought to centre stage as a key factor in national competitiveness and modernization. The aim of this review is to discuss quality assurance and Bologna Process in the higher education.

1.1.What is the Bologna Process?

The Bologna Process derives its name from the so-called Bologna Declaration, which was signed on June 19th, 1999 by ministers in charge of higher education from 29 European countries. It is an intergovernmental European reform process aimed at establishing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 (Kehm-2010). It was then opened to other countries signatory to the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe, and by 2012 the number of countries that had joined the process had risen to 47, a number that is unlikely to change given the criteria for eligibility. The vision was that students would be able to choose from a wide and transparent range of high-quality courses and benefit from smooth recognition procedures both within and between national higher education systems. Thus, the stated intention was to make European higher education more compatible and comparable, more competitive and attractive, both for Europeans and for students and scholars from other continents. In order to achieve this, reforms were needed to make European higher

education systems more understandable and to improve their quality. Indeed the Bologna Process has arguably become the most significant and transformative higher education reform process in history. It provides a forum for debate and an important mechanism to focus higher education reforms in European countries. All of the 47 countries that are currently formal members of the Bologna Process have undertaken significant reforms to their higher education systems. Another important development is the fact that since the beginning of the Bologna Process, European higher education systems have grown signicantly. As the size of the student population has grown, so too has the number of higher education institutions, at least in most countries. In Armenia, the Czech Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, and Slovenia, the number of higher education institutions has increased by more than 100 per cent. A large part of this growth has been in vocational and professional higher education programmes, and the sector has also seen growth in private, government-recognized higher education institutions. Central to the Bologna Process is the commitment of countries to establish a three-cycle degree structure in higher education. The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), adopted by the ministers in Bergen in May 2005, reflects this focus on the three-cycle structure. Typically, First-cycle qualifications comprise 180–240 ECTS credits and second-cycle qualifications 60–120 ECTS credits. The three-cycle structure has been overwhelmingly introduced in most institutions and programmes in countries that adopted the bologna process (Crosier-2013). The proportion of students studying in programmes corresponding to the Bologna three-cycle system is greater than 90 per cent in just over half of the countries, and between 70 and 89 per cent in another quarter of the countries. However, most countries still have long programmes of 5–6 years in specific disciplines that are not in line with the typical Bologna cycle structures. This applies most often to medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, architecture, veterinary medicine, and, to a lesser extent engineering, law, theology, psychology and teacher training (Crosier-2013). In this context the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention and pan-European transparency tools like the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement (DS) play a crucial role. Equally important are the overarching qualifications framework for the EHEA and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA. The latter will also function as admission criteria for quality assurance and accreditation agencies in the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies.

The Bologna Process is taken forward through a work programme that receives orientations from biannual ministerial conferences Prague 2001, Berlin 2003, Bergen 2005, London 2007, Leuven 2009, and Budapest and Vienna 2010 . These conferences are prepared by a Bologna Follow-up Group, which is in turn supported by a Bologna Secretariat. The key to success of the Bologna cooperation is the underlying partnership approach, in both policy-making and implementation. Today, the Process unites 47 countries, all party to the European Cultural Convention, that cooperate in a flexible way, involving also international organisations and European associations representing higher education institutions, students, staff and employers.

In accordance with the Bologna Process the action lines of the process are as follows:

1.1.1.Introduced in the Bologna Declaration:

a) Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees

b) Adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles

c) Establishment of a system of credits

d) Promotion of mobility

e) Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance

f) Promotion of the European dimension in higher education.

1.1.2.Introduced in the Prague Communiqué:

a) Lifelong learning

b) Higher education institutions and students

c) Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

1.1.3.Introduced in the Berlin Communiqué:

Doctoral studies and the synergy between the EHEA and ERA (http://bologna.yok.gov.tr)

The social dimension of higher education might be seen as an overarching or transversal action line increasing demand for higher education, on the contrary, the inability to increase the monetary supply for higher education at the same amount, fast economic and social change, increase in the demand of more aggravated service from the higher education institutions, urges higher education institutions be more systematic and act more strategically in their education, research and other services.

This change, is also applicable for the European level with a radical impetus, starting with the Lisbon Process which aims at developing a knowledge based society and economy. In this framework, the intention of the European countries to develop a "European Higher Education Area" and " European Research Area" has been shaped by the Bologna Process, and have been supported and developed by the persecutor processes. Nowadays, these processes have been running with a great impetus. Within these endeavors, strengthening of the European higher education, improvement of the quality levels, development of quality assurance systems became the most important agenda items.

1.2. Quality Assurance

Over the last several decades, the quality of teaching and learning in colleges and universities has become an issue of growing concern and scrutiny in many countries around the world. Despite the fact that there is no shared definition of the term "quality," many European higher education institutions have established quality-management systems and are making continuous efforts to ensure and improve the quality of teaching and learning. But these efforts tend to be compromised to some extent by quality seen as an aspect of accountability or of standard-setting. Increasingly, internal quality management is complemented by external quality assurance mechanisms, complete with quantifiable indicators, that reflect a considerable loss of public trust in higher education. Moreover, even within higher education, quality measures that focus on teaching and learning come into conflict with quality as defined by research reputation (Kehm-2010).

Although the Dublin Descriptors are focused on general intellectual skills, there is also work being done on subject specific model curricula, especially in the project "Tuning Educational Structures in Europe" (known as the "Tuning Project"), which began in the year 2000. Its aim is to align curricular structures, programs, and teaching across the various national systems and to integrate quality standards into the structures and content of program curricula such that they can be evaluated in comparable ways. The Tuning Project provides guidelines for the implementation of comparable degree structures; for a credit transfer and accumulation system; for the transmission of generic and subject-specific competences; for changes that are needed in teaching, learning, and assessment; and finally for the enhancement of educational quality. It strongly supports the shift in focus from teaching to learning and has developed model curriculafor nine subjects so far. The Tuning Project operates at the level of the disciplines rather than that of the educational system. One of the main innovations that Tuning has generated is the linkage between learning outcomes, competences, and ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) workload-based credits. The project has come up with substantive and helpful definitions of these concepts. Thus it defines "learning outcomes" as "statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of learning. Learning outcomes specify the requirements for award of credit" . "Competences"' are defined as "a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills, and abilities. Fostering competences is the object of educational programmes. Competences will be formed in various course units and assessed at different stages." Each unit—be it a course, a module, or a programme or cycle of study—has its own set of learning outcomes formulated in terms of competences. In addition, to each of these units credit points are attached that reflect the student workload that is thought to be necessary to achieve the learning outcomes and acquire the relevant competences. As a rule, one European credit point equals 25 to 30 hours of student workload; in a given academic year, full-time students are expected to earn approximately 60 credit points.

1.2.1.Tunıng Hıstory

The Tuning template for history starts with an introduction of the subject area and a description of the degree it offers. It goes on to define the typical occupations of history graduates from all levels (bachelor's, master's, and doctorate) and the role of history as a subject area in other degree programs (e.g.,the arts, philosophy, archaeology, and so on). Learning outcomes and competences are defined for the various levels. A student graduating from a history program with a bachelor degree, for example, should

- Possess general knowledge with respect to the methodologies, tools, and tissues of all the broad chronological division into which history is normally divided, from ancient to recent times.
- Have spesific knowledge of at least one of the above periods or of a diachronic theme.
- Be aware of historical interests, categories and problems change with time and how histographical debate is linked to the political and cultural concerns of each epoch.
- Have demonstrated the ability to present in oral and written form and medium-length piece of research which demonstrates the ability to retrive bibliographical information and primary sources and use of them do address histographical problem.

These definitions are followed by a distribution of workload and credit points.

The last part of the template is comprised of clusters of competences and their connection to teaching, learning ,and assessment for purposes of quality enhancement. A list of 31 subject-specific skills and competences for history is added as an annex to the template (Zineldin -2011).

The European conception of quality is widened by an initiative of the European Commission, namely the development of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF), to which all national qualifications frameworks have to be adapted. Working within a framework of lifelong learning, the EQF conceptualizes the levels of education as a continuously progressing sequence of learning and the acquisition of competences. It establishes eight levels of education and provides descriptors for each level in three dimensions: knowledge, skills and competences. Higher education qualifications are described in levels six to eight, which correspond to the bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees. All descriptors address both professional and academic practice, thus making it possible to decouple eligibility for access into higher education from levels of school-leaving certificates. For example, people who can prove that they have acquired the knowledge, skills and competences that characterize level six through professional practice or informal learning become eligible for admission into a master's program. Thus the quality agenda has been linked to the aim of widening participation in higher education (Kehm-2010).

The challenges in achieving higher education excellence are many and difficult to deal with as for any other industry. Vazzana et al. (2000) identify three main areas of quality improvement in higher education: curriculum, non-academic functions and academic administration. Student survey, student feedback and measurement are also important elements in quality improvement for quality management applications and student satisfaction (Bayraktar et al., 2008; Houston et al., 2008; Kanji Malek & Wallace 1999; Harvey et al., 1997; Harvey 2003; Williams & Cappuccini-Ansfield, 2007). Indeed, student feedback on their experiences has emerged as one of the central pillars of the quality process In higher education there are problems of structure, personalities, students, academic staff, university staff and management. All this creates a complex situation in which higher education is assessed as to how well students are satisfied, what is valued by students, how students perceive the quality of education and how these can be improved. The Turkish higher education system is a highly centralised system in which the government exercises close and strict control through the Higher Education Council (Yuksek Ogretim Kurulu (YOK)). The system was formed to meet and solve Turkey's workforce needs rather than to train the mind (Oktik, 2000). There is a strong demand for higher education in Turkey, where the only way to enter a university is to pass the nationwide university entrance examination held annually. The number of applicants for the year 2009 was 958,628, while only 786,677 were able to register onto a programme and nearly 5% were enrolled at

private universities (OSYM, 2009). This shows the high level of competition to enter a higher education institution. According to a YOK strategy report (YOK, 2006), the number of students has increased 3.8 times in postsecondary programmes, 1.7 times in undergraduate programmes, 2.6 times in graduate programmes and 2.1 times in total over the last 12 years.

The Higher Education Council was established in 1981 and reshaped and unified the higher education sector by centralising all the universities to one council (YOK, 2009). In 1981, there were only 27 state-owned universities. This number has increased almost four times, reaching 102 in 2011, of which 54 are private universities (YOK, 2011b). The reason for the expansion of universities is a response to student demand or due to the change from élite to mass higher education as a result of social, political and economic pressure (Oktik, 2000). The opening of the new universities throughout the country increased the student capacity and also broke the previous élitist domination of the metropolitan universities (Oktik, 2000). During the expansion phase some of the new universities were not properly planned or organised. According to Oktik (2000) in the rapid expansion, academic goals and the main purposes of universities were sometimes neglected while these institutions were endeavouring to respond to the huge demand for student places. It is clear that with this sudden increase in the number of universities Turkey faced a greater problem, which was low quality of education due to poor university staff.

Quality assurance of higher education is a multi-faceted concept with different culturally determined connotations (Ursin et al., 2008). Quality assurance and standardisation have emerged in the sector as a result of concerns about the quality of the newly established higher education institutions and have gained popularity, especially following the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations (Bayraktar et al., 2008; YOK, 2006; Mizikaci, 2003). Some of the quality efforts date back to the 1990s and some leading universities such as Middle East Technical University, Bosphorus, Marmara and Istanbul Technical University are, for example, accredited by ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) to be recognised internationally as a measure of quality assurance (YOK, 2006; TUSIAD, 2003). In 2006, seven Turkish universities participated in the European Universities Association (EUA), which aims to spread and promote quality culture among the participants (YOK, 2006; Bayraktar et al., 2008). The future policies and planning of Turkish higher education are now defined by the European integration programmes and agreements (Mizikaci, 2006). To become compatible with the European Higher Education Area, structural changes are required in curricula leading to the introduction of innovative teaching and learning processes as well as changes in legislation (Mizikaci, 2006).

The Bologna process is an intergovernmental European reform process aimed at establishing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. This EHEA is envisaged as an open space that allows students, graduates and higher education staff to benefit from unhampered mobility and equitable access to high-quality higher education (YOK, 2011). Total quality management (TQM) applications have been popular among Turkish higher education institutions since the late 1990s (Bayraktar et al., 2008). According to Bayraktar et al. (2008) this has been an era of massive introduction of private universities into Turkish higher education. Even though there was a huge demand for universities, it was still a strong challenge for private institutions to attract students who were not used to paying for education. Hence, the need to attract students with the quality of education plus quality of service, the quality of environment and the quality of Quality in Higher Education 233 Downloaded by the atmosphere. Quality of services was the main competitive weapon for the private institutions. Based on recent YOK regulation, accepted in September 2005, all higher education institutions in Turkey are required to establish an Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Committee to monitor their educational, training and research activities, along with their administrative services, to improve their quality and to get approval and recognition of their quality levels from independent ‘external examiners’(Zineldin-2011).

Despite the fact that Europeans still tend to look at the American higher education system when seeking solutions to prevailing problems, the Bologna Process—despite all its existing shortcomings, paradoxes, and ambiguous goals—has contributed to the emergence of a European mainstream that is different from Anglo-American higher education models. The vision of the Bologna Process is to have

a European higher education area with a system of easily recognisable and compatible degrees, a system of transferable credits that can be accumulated towards a degree in various ways, and quality standards that can form the basis of renewed trustand mutual recognition. However, a number of contratidiction continue to persist (Kehm-2010).

The internal QA is the heart of the overall QA system for higher education in Turkey. It is believed that the developments in the field have brought about a tremendous consciousness in quality culture and change in the management of higher education institutions which recognizes the importance of internal QA procedures in the services they provide. All higher education institutions have their own publicly available five-year strategic plans published with clear measurable objectives and policies including the main issues outlined in the European Standards and Guidelines for QA in Higher Education as well as the financial planning for resource. It has also become a regular exercise that institutions perform an annual self-assessment at beginning of each year with the results submitted to the Council of Higher Education (YOK-5).

Quality Assurance and Bologna Process in Turkish Higher education

Within the Bologna Process, the works done in this framework was published in the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" by the "European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education" (ENQA). The standards and guidelines published in the mentioned report are the pathfinder elements to the work that have been done in the process. In this connection, it is aimed to reach an increased level of quality in a comparable manner among the higher education institutions.

The quality assurance (QA) system partially established in Turkey is based on institutional evaluation, which includes annual internal assessments and post-assessment studies (review their improvement through periodical monitoring and improvement process for continuous improvement) carried out by universities and external evaluation carried out every 5 years under normal conditions. The system has also been designed to involve accreditation and evaluation elements in order to guarantee the quality assurance of learning outcomes determined on major/program basis in the scope of national qualifications framework(NQF) (Crosier-2013).

First, further expansion through widening access will not remove existing inequalities among institutions. Indeed, Brennan, Naidoo, and Patel (2009) have pointed out that the most probable trend will be one of further vertical differentiation and stratification. The question will no longer be what someone studied but where someone studied as a sector of elite institutions that reinforce existing inequalities within the mass systems of higher education continues to emerge. At the same time, while expansion means more heterogeneity in expectations (of the students) and functions (of the institutions), a countervailing trend will be the tendency of institutions to imitate the most prestigious among them rather than to become more diverse. Second, the thrust of the Bologna Process and of the work of ENQA and the Tuning Project is directed at convergence and the equivalence of quality standards, leading to cross-national evaluation and quality-assurance processes in order to ensure the comparability of degrees.

In contrast, vertical differentiation emphasizes differences (often expressed in positions on ranking scales), while at the same time reducing them as every institution opts to play the game and strives to imitate those higher up on the scale. What David Dill calls an "academic arms race" (2009) will make it all the more difficult for Europe to achieve an acceptable balance between harmonization and differentiation. Third, there is a danger that eventually an internationally accredited group of elite institutions will emerge within Europe that will be independent from nationally regulated quality assurance mechanisms. The question that needs to be asked in this context is whether some universities within a given national system of higher education should remain part of that system or whether they should be allowed to opt out of it. Europe has always been proud of its rich cultural traditions and identities, styles of teaching and learning, and curricula. So

horizontal, functional differentiation has served most European higher education systems well. It remains to be seen whether Europe can harmonize its systems of higher education and at the same time maintain that rich diversity and honor more than one form of excellence (Kehm-2010).

A new "Regulation on Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement at Higher Education Institutions", complying with the recommendations and criteria of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA was enacted on September 20, 2005. The Regulation determines the principles for evaluating and improving the quality of educational, instructional and research activities and administrative services at higher education institutions, as well as approval and recognition of their level of quality through an independent external assessment. It ensures the internal assessment of academic activities and administrative services of higher education institutions, which is carried out periodically every year, starting from the beginning of 2006, and a cyclical external assessment every five years. The results of both internal and external assessments are open to the public.

Following the adoption of the regulation, the independent "Commission for Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement in Higher Education (YODEK)" with 9 members elected by the Inter-university Council – IUC (composed of the rectors and the university representatives elected by the senates of the universities) and one student member appointed by the national student union was formed. The commission is responsible for maintaining and organizing the activities related to academic assessment and quality improvements at higher education institutions within the provisions set forth by the regulation. The related regulation aims to establish independent national external QA agencies. The independent body *YODEK* responsible for implementing the regulation is also the authority to grant license to national external QA agencies. A higher education institution undergoing external assessment may obtain a "Quality Certificate" indicating its level of quality and the level of quality improvements achieved in that institution. The period of validity of the certificate is five years. The Quality Certificate may be obtained by a higher education institution at institutional level as well as at the levels of academic unit(s) or program(s) in these units. The Commission for Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement in HE *(YÖDEK)* has issued standards and guidelines and defined the processes and indicators necessary for maintenance of the activities for academic assessment and quality improvement (YOK-5).

In HEIs:

These include the main processes of:

- Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement
- Strategic Planning
- Institutional Assessment (self-and environmental)

Within the scope of the regulations set up, at national level; YÖDEK and at institutional level; Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement Boards (ADEKs) are responsible for organizing, coordinating and conducting the processes (YOK).

Recently, some independent national quality agencies started to work on acquiring accredited status of external quality assurance agency. Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Engineering Programs (MUDEK) was awarded the license for external assessment of engineering programs on 15 November 2007 and acquired an accredited status as an independent external quality assurance agency. So far, MUDEK has accredited 57 engineering programs in 10 different universities. Furthermore, there are two more sectoral agencies (for health and architecture programs) which applied to *YODEK* to become independent national accreditation agencies.At present, the Turkish quality assurance system is open to evaluation from abroad – a practice widely used by many universities. As of today, 42 engineering programmes of the four Turkish universities have been evaluated by the "Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology-USA (ABET)" at different times and received "substantial equivalence" from ABET (YOK) (http://bologna.yok.gov.tr).

We conclude that the focus of current reform should be on developing internal quality practices and encouraging participation of all stakeholders. Turkish higher education needs to find its own combination of measures that will consider historical and social characteristics of quality culture and to develop strategies be fitting Turkey's conditions (Ince-2014).

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