

Tatjana Marjanović

HOW THE BOLOGNA PROCESS HAS CHANGED THE CLASSROOM

The Bologna process is generally described as a joint effort of European education policy makers and universities in creating a common higher education area in Europe aimed at increased student and staff mobility, as well as overall comparability and compatibility of higher education systems across Europe. The large-scale reforms have inspired and generated volumes of academic publications from a number of perspectives, e.g. economic, legal, political, and so forth. What seems to be lacking at this point is a more practical investigation into how the Bologna process has transformed the education systems of some of its less visible member countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. More specifically, the aim is to show how the reforms have affected what goes on in the classroom by comparing select aspects of studying in both pre-and post-Bologna times at one of the country's universities. Examples have been given of courses taught and taken at the University of Banja Luka's English Department pre-and post-Bologna to draw a parallel between some of the coursework and examination requirements now and then.

Key words: *the Bologna process, University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

INTRODUCTION

Some general facts and opinions about the Bologna process that originate from experts and the general public alike are interspersed with brief comparisons of select aspects of the reforms in different countries and, more specifically, between pre- and post-Bologna English studies undergraduate programmes at the University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Bologna process has acquired a number of different interpretations since it was introduced in 1998 by the Sorbonne Declaration, which then led to the signing of the Bologna Declaration a year later. Among other things, the Bologna process is often seen as a European response to the

domination of the higher education sector by the USA and the rapid growth of emergent higher education institutions in Asia.

As a large-scale European education project, it is assumed to have reached similar levels of public visibility in all of its 48 participating countries across Europe. However, the Bologna process does not necessarily occupy the same amount of public space everywhere in Europe so it is not at all uncommon to learn of higher education practitioners who still have not gained sufficient familiarity with what insiders simply call Bologna – notwithstanding the fact that it has been around for some twenty years and that they have had to implement the changes it has brought about in the education systems of their respective countries. To put it simply, in such countries the Bologna process has been discussed mostly out of the public eye and without the immediate involvement of teaching staff. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, a teacher at university is only required to implement the reforms but is not necessarily encouraged to seek more information about them.

CREATING A EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (EHEA)

The Sorbonne Declaration, which was signed in 1998, was a prelude to the Bologna Declaration of 1999 with its 31 signatories. The following excerpt from the Sorbonne Declaration (1998), which highlights the European mission of the initiative, was jointly signed by the four Ministers in charge for France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom:

The European process has very recently moved some extremely important steps ahead. Relevant as they are, they should not make one forget that Europe is not only that of the Euro, of the banks and the economy: it must be a Europe of knowledge as well. We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. (p. 1)

The Sorbonne Declaration (1998, p. 3) ends with a call to “other Member States of the Union and other European countries to join [in]”.

Before long the call was answered and the Bologna Declaration (1999) was signed with the aim of making European higher education more competitive internationally:

We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions. (p. 2)

Since the signing of the two declarations, nine different European cities have hosted the ensuing ministerial conferences: the first one was held in Prague in 2001, and the most recent one in Paris in 2018. An excerpt from the Paris Communiqué (2018) highlights the clearly European mission of the Bologna process:

We have built something unique: a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in which goals and policies are agreed upon at European level, and then implemented in national education systems and higher education institutions. This is an area where governments, higher education institutions and stakeholders are shaping the landscape of higher education together; that demonstrates what a joint effort and continuous dialogue among governments and the higher education sector can attain. Through the EHEA, we have paved the way for large-scale student mobility and improved not only the comparability and transparency of our higher education systems, but also increased their quality and attractiveness. The EHEA has promoted mutual understanding and trust, and has enhanced cooperation among our higher education systems. (p. 1)

The Bologna process is thus a term that suggests continuity in the implementation and assessment of the EHEA policies and objectives. Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been a full member since 2003, is one of the 48 participating countries. Next to full members, there are also expert organisations, which act as consultative members, and partners, which are organisations that wish to be associated with the Bologna process.

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AS DEPICTED IN THE PRESS

Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the countries that have had to undergo what is known as Bologna reform. Such countries face the challenge of transitioning from a pre-Bologna system of education to one that complies with the core principles of the Bologna process.

Although the concept of Bologna is rather complex, the average education practitioner in Bosnia and Herzegovina sees the process as being mainly about the ECTS points. For example, fitting an entire curriculum into an ECTS format has been one of the most massive tasks for Bosnia and Herzegovina's educators to perform since 2003.

More recently, the idea of academic mobility has been receiving more attention from both staff and students. However, although they recognise mobility as one of the most important principles of the reforms, countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina have yet to overcome the language barrier: English and other foreign languages are rarely spoken at all, let alone at a level which enables students and staff to get actively involved in international study programmes. Overall, it is common knowledge that success in different aspects of the reforms has been both uneven and variable across the 48 voting countries.

Milan Mataruga, the University of Banja Luka's former Chancellor, has commented for a national daily that two decades into the reforms public opinion is still divided as to whether the pros outweigh the cons of these ambitious large-scale educational reforms (Mataruga, 2018, para. 1). The ex-Chancellor concedes that the general public, teaching staff, as well as students feel that the reforms have failed to improve the quality of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in part by not being able to put theory into practice (Mataruga, 2018, para. 6). Mataruga's opinion echoes the commonly held view that the principles of the Bologna process are most commendable but almost impossible to implement.

Much unlike Bosnia and Herzegovina, countries such as the UK have given the Bologna process significant media coverage from the earliest days with the aim of highlighting and addressing its most controversial aspects. For example, it has not gone unnoticed that the UK as a world educational leader and countries that do not share the same standards of excellence in education now make part of the same framework. Addressing the issue, Peter Scott half-jokingly makes the following comment for *The Guardian*: "We only go through the Bologna motions to be polite, while reassuring ourselves that the original intention of Bologna was to make the rest of Europe more like us" (Scott, 2012, para. 8).

Another comment Scott (2012) makes echoes the oft-expressed criticism of the overly bureaucratized manner in which the process has been handled:

The Bologna process has been key to [the] success of European higher education – in spirit if not substance. It has provided a flag around which reformers have rallied, and been a catalyst for innovations that had little to do with the action lines agreed at successive EHEA ministerial meetings. (para. 11)

The Bologna process has so far not been able to project an all-round positive image although its truly transformative potential has never been denied:

The problem is that nowadays higher education is seen more as a bundle of funding, structural and managerial issues, rather like the bad side of Bologna; and less as an academic enterprise, whether in terms of transforming student lives or shaping new ideas, the good side of Bologna. (Scott, 2012, para. 13)

More recently, Jonathan Wolff has shared his concerns that quantification, which seems to be one of the most conspicuous features of the reforms, makes both research and teaching suffer:

We have drifted into a system in which universities have to mimic tough business practices simply in order to survive. Luckily, most universities are held together by a core of academics and support staff who preserve the authentic values of teaching and research. But goodwill has limits. (Wolff, 2017, para. 9)

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AS DEPICTED IN AN EXPERT REPORT

British experts on education have also voiced their main concerns about the Bologna process, some of which are presented below (Education and Skills Committee, 2007). One of the concerns expressed in the report is that “[m]any academics do not appear to have a high level of engagement with the Bologna Process. [...] Bologna does not feature prominently on the agendas of Councils, Senates and faculty boards or, apparently, in common room conversation” (p. 55).

The various steps taken in the implementation of Bologna reform have hardly been depicted as non-compulsory to higher education practitioners in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which makes the emphasis on the voluntary principle stand out even more in the excerpt below:

We welcome the emphasis [...] on the importance of the voluntary principle in the development of the Bologna Process. We agree that there is a need to maintain a flexible and varied pattern of awards and qualifications across the European Higher Education Area, within which compatibility will be underpinned by effective within-country quality assurance systems. (p. 60)

Likewise, labels such as ECTS and Diploma Supplement seem to have been readily accepted on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina's educationalists without any other competing options, whereas the UK experts offer alternatives to the existing solutions, as evidenced by the following lines: "We [...] suggest that 'Diploma Supplement' could be replaced with 'Qualification Transcript' as a more descriptive and easily-recognised name" (p. 56). That Bologna should not be reduced to strict compliance is reiterated in the wording of the excerpt below:

The Bologna Process [...] is a non-binding inter-governmental initiative between its signatory countries. To understand this is to understand the nature of the Bologna Process as intended from its origin. It is not a European Community initiative, project, or official programme. (p. 66)

Finally, the expanding role of the European Commission in the process has been singled out in the report as the greatest concern: "We recommend that the Government be increasingly vigilant in guarding against a move towards bureaucratic, top-down, detailed agreements" (p. 65). Along those lines, attempts at standardisation and uniformity are criticised as major threats behind the process, while the focus remains on institutional autonomy and flexibility, as well as on comparability and compatibility (p. 64).

ON ECTS AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

ECTS, which stands for European Credit Transfer System, enables higher educational institutions to transfer and translate academic credit across Europe. It is a standardised system that allows universities in Europe to

compare the courses and results that students achieve while studying at different institutions (Weingarten, 2018). As the system eases the comparison between degree programmes and student performance across Europe, it is meant to encourage and facilitate student mobility.

ECTS points are allocated to all educational components of a higher education study programme (e.g. modules, courses, dissertation work, etc.). Basically, credits are equivalent to the number of hours that learners are likely to spend studying in order to achieve the specified learning outcomes of a particular course.

The system is based on the principle that 60 higher education academic credits measure the workload of a full-time university student during a single academic year. The expectation is that the workload of a full-time university study programme in Europe is, in most instances, equivalent to approximately 1500-1800 hours per year, which means that one credit represents approximately 25-30 study hours. For example, if a module or course has been allocated 10 credits, it is expected to have twice the workload of a course with five credits. However, these calculations are essentially estimates because students could easily spend much more time on a course they are not so familiar with and probably much less on a course which is in their field of interest and expertise.

What makes academic credits even more confusing is the many different systems that are in use across different countries and institutions. In some countries the same system is used throughout, whereas in other countries different systems may apply to different universities.

In the UK, the credit system used as a method of quantifying credit for a particular course is abbreviated to CATS, which stands for Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme. However, most UK universities have also adopted the ECTS to make it easier for international students to transfer their credit back to the home country.

The basic CATS calculation is that for every two hours of tuition students engage in eight hours of private study. CATS points convert to ECTS academic credits when divided by two: for instance, 120 CATS equals 60 ECTS ("Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme," n.d.). The scheme, which enables students to transfer the credits they have accumulated at one

institution of learning to another, equates one credit or credit point with 10 hours of notional learning time, which is the estimated time a learner takes to achieve the specified learning outcomes. A module allocated 30 credits or CATS points roughly means that students are expected to commit approximately 300 hours of work to achieving the learning outcomes for the particular module.

On the other hand, higher education institutions in Scotland use a credit-based system called the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The Scottish equivalent of both ECTS and CATS, it is designed to manage curricula as well as standards of qualifications.

In the United States, most programmes use the Semester Credit Hours (SCH) system. For example, one US credit equals two ECTS and four CATS, which is what many universities accept as a rule of thumb (“How Do Credit Systems Work?”, n.d.).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the English acronym ECTS remains almost exclusively in use although there exists an easily translatable alternative in Serbian (ESPB, which stands for *Evropski sistem za prenos bodova*).

THE BOLOGNA REFORMS IN THE CLASSROOM: CURRICULA AND EXAMINATIONS

The bulk of academic interest in the Bologna process has been more or less theoretical in nature with a focus on some of the following topics: the role of the European Commission (Keeling, 2006), the construction of the European citizen (Fejes, 2008), institutional autonomy (Ravinet, 2008), the globalisation of European higher education (Munar, 2007), curriculum development (Heitmann, 2005), etc.

Although these and many other different aspects of the Bologna process clearly affect both teaching and learning, few of them report how the Bologna process actually works as far as teachers and students are concerned. We shall therefore try to fill that gap by pointing out a few changes that have occurred since the reforms first made their way into the national curricula of Bosnia and Herzegovina as one of the signatories of the Bologna Declaration.

This inevitably sketchy account does not pretend to have high aspirations; on the contrary, the idea is to keep the discussion as closely as possible within the bounds of the new, Bologna classroom at the University of Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and compare it to the past ways and practices of what is nowadays commonly referred to as the pre-Bologna system of education.

The pre-Bologna curriculum, popularly called the old programme, differs from the reformed one in several aspects, the most important of which are the number of courses per year and the introduction of midterm examinations.

The old undergraduate programme lasted four years, as does the reformed one. Each study year was divided into two semesters (generally known as terms), winter and summer, which has remained the same in the reformed curriculum.

The greatest novelty was the introduction of credit points allocated to each course in the curriculum to reach a total translatable into a bachelor's degree (240 ECTS). With it came an entirely new coursework setup: a pre-Bologna English major had to take a total of 24 courses spread across four study years (7+6+5+6), all of which were core; the reformed curriculum made room for a total of 44 courses distributed across the eight semesters of the University of Banja Luka's corresponding undergraduate study programme. Year one and two evened out on the number of courses with six courses taken in the winter and five more in the summer semester; year three totals twelve courses, six in each semester, and year four rounds it off with a total of ten courses, five in each semester.

Although the new curriculum enables English majors to choose which electives they are going to take, that practice does not have any bearing on the actual number of courses taken per year. In other words, each student is required to sign up for one of the electives that is being offered in that particular semester or academic year, which means that skipping a course equals failing to accumulate the number of academic credits required for that particular semester/year of the undergraduate study programme.

Twenty-four as opposed to forty-four courses already makes for a significant change, which is further complicated by a much larger number of

examinations sat by the students. In other words, it is not only a matter of final examinations, which the students are allowed to re-sit three times free of charge (a fourth and every subsequent attempt is liable to a payment equivalent to roughly ten euros), but also of all the midterm and end-of-term examinations that precede the taking of a final examination. In principle, each course should consist of one midterm and one end-of-term paper, quiz, test, etc. preceding a final examination. That means that successful English majors will have at least 132 different kinds of examinations to sit before they are awarded their bachelor's degree! Being tested 132 times must inevitably put a lot of strain on the students, just as it surely adds to the already heavy workload of those who are in charge of the preparation and administration of any one of those examinations.

There is another practical issue that both students and teachers have been struggling with ever since the outset of the reforms. Here it will be referred to as the seventh or eighth semester week, which is when midterm examinations are recommended to take place. The main problem with cramming most midterm examinations into a single week or a span of two weeks is that it completely disrupts the teaching process until the midterm examination period is over. That everything is put on hold during that time is an honest, if intuitive, reflection on how it affects the teaching process. Some students skip class in order to stay at home and revise; those who show up are generally unable to focus on what is going on in the classroom for reasons such as sleep deprivation, examination anxiety, and so forth. As a result, not only does this make teaching very difficult, if not impossible, but it is also questionable whether the students themselves can realistically perform to the best of their ability in such circumstances.

As far as final examinations are concerned, this is how they are normally distributed within a single academic year: two final examinations are administered in summer (one in June and another one in July), three more in autumn (two in September and another one in October), another two in winter (both usually taking place in February), and one more in spring (during the month of April). That makes a total of eight final examinations a student can take within one academic year at the University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Considering the average class size, one final examination can be taken by up to 50 candidates at a time. Although this only makes for a rough assessment and there are clearly examinations

taken by only a couple of students at any one time, it is clear that the amount of work that the teacher in charge has to put into designing test materials and grading student papers, as well as doing the extensive follow-up paperwork that is part of every final examination, is not to be underestimated.

THE BOLOGNA REFORMS IN THE CLASSROOM: A COMPARISON OF TWO COURSES

The first example of how Bologna affects what is taught and possibly learnt, both in the classroom and at home, is a second-year language course called English Morphosyntax 1, which is taken in the summer semester. It is followed by Morphosyntax 2, a third-year course taught in the winter semester. In the pre-Bologna English studies curriculum, the two courses used to be an integral two-semester course simply referred to as English Morphosyntax. English Morphosyntax 1 delves into the structure of the complex noun phrase and its clausal as well as phrase-embedded functions (e.g. subject, direct object, premodifier, postmodifier, etc.); English Morphosyntax 2 is concerned with all the other phrase-level structures in English (i.e. adjective phrase, adverb phrase, prepositional phrase, and verb phrase) and their corresponding functions (e.g. complement, adverbial, etc.). As most of the structures taught in the Morphosyntax 2 course also form part of the complex noun phrase in English, it already makes somewhat artificial the division of what is basically the same subject matter into two components. Lending more support to this view is the fact that both courses draw from the same reference books, e.g. Quirk et al. (1991), Downing & Locke (2002), Huddleston & Pullum (2002), Carter & McCarthy (2006). The students are also not in a position to see the bigger picture now that the structures and their corresponding functions are taught between two semesters as part of two separate courses. In other words, the students are not given enough time to develop a fuller understanding of this extremely complex subject matter, which is a shortcoming that deserves to be taken seriously.

What follows is another example of how the pre-Bologna syllabi of an English department with a focus on both language and literature have been tailored to fit the one-semester of teaching in the new curriculum. This time it concerns a second-year pre-Bologna literature course entitled English

Literature 2. The students were required to read the following nine novels and one play in the course of a year: Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*, William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and George Bernard Shaw's *Candida* (Dijana Tica, personal communication).

The old literature course was then transformed into two one-semester courses taught in the same year: one is entitled Literature of English Classicism and Romanticism, and the other is dubbed Victorian Literature. The syllabus of the former comes complete with the following four titles for the students to read in full: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The latter's reading list includes the following seven titles: Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and George Bernard Shaw's *Candida*.

Victorian Literature thus requires the students to read five novels and two plays in the course of one semester, which is a significant number compared to the ten works on the year-round reading list for the old literature course. Also, some novels were taken off the reading list due to their excessive length, e.g. 500 pages or more.

The pre-Bologna English Literature 2 course was structured around the following 19 authors: Thomas Gray, Laurence Sterne, Robert Burns, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, George Gordon Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, and George Bernard Shaw. Literature of English Classicism and Romanticism as a reformed course introduces the following 17 authors, seven of whom are new additions while 10 are taken over from the old syllabus: John Bunyan, John Dryden, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding; Thomas Gray, Laurence Sterne, Robert Burns,

William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, George Gordon Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and Jane Austen. Victorian Literature aims to introduce the following 11 authors: Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, Matthew Arnold, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. To sum up, the old course dealt with a total of 19 authors, while the number went up to 28 for the two reformed courses.

Other examples include pre-Bologna two-semester courses that have been renamed and made to last one semester, such as English Literature 3, which is now entitled Shakespeare, and English Literature 4, which has now become Literature of English Modernism. Moreover, both these courses are taught in the same semester, which means that the students' reading load has in theory doubled. There are also courses, mainly elective, taught now which do not have their origins in the pre-Bologna curriculum (Dijana Tica, personal communication). All these examples suggest that the reading load has in theory increased, but the question remains whether the students can keep up with such an ambitiously designed curriculum.

CONCLUSION

Although it may seem counterintuitive, it is possible that the students enrolled in the English department at the University of Banja Luka read and study less now than they did before. Too much of their time is spent sitting one examination or another, which leaves too little time for research and studying. Exam-taking has become so central an activity in the life of a student that it seems to have pushed all the other aspects of studying at university aside.

A popular view is that the higher education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been made to resemble a poorly designed model of secondary schooling, and some of the reasons are as follows: the courses do not last long enough to enable long-term transfer of skills and knowledge; the large concentration and density of midterm examinations taking place at roughly the same time (i.e. the seventh or eighth week of the semester) has an overall effect of study fragmentation and actually distracts the students from gaining in-depth knowledge about the subject matter; in transition

countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, these negative effects are not compensated for by increased transfer of knowledge and mobility, which holds for the rest of Europe; research is hindered by the amount of administrative work and related commitments teachers are now required to perform on a large scale.

All of this makes one wonder whether the reforms are being implemented without much regard for how they affect the teaching process, those who teach, and the students themselves. What is described here seems to have very little to do with student mobility and all the other positive aspects of the Bologna process. The Erasmus programme, which promotes mobility, was launched about thirty years ago, yet it is only recently that we have seen more students and staff at the University of Banja Luka get involved in it.

As we begin to understand that the most important reforms take place in the classroom, we also understand that we can no longer ignore the voices there that are getting louder and want to be heard.

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KAKO JE BOLONJSKI PROCES IZMIJENIO UČIONICU

Rezime

Bolonjski proces može se posmatrati kao evropski projekat u oblasti visokog obrazovanja s ciljem da se poveća mobilnost akademskog osoblja i studenata, a samim tim i transfer znanja, kao i da se različiti obrazovni sistemi u Evropi usklade i olakšaju prohodnost informacija i aktera u ovom procesu. Bolonjske reforme inspirisale su naučnike iz raznih oblasti da ovoj širokoj temi pristupe iz mnoštva različitih uglova, npr. ekonomskog, pravnog ili političkog. Među takvim publikacijama najmanje je onih koje se bave analizom provođenja reformi u manje vidljivim članicama ove evropske porodice, među njima i Bosne i Hercegovine. Još je manje onih koje se bave promjenama do kojih je ovaj dalekosežni projekat doveo u neposrednom nastavnom procesu u kojem su glavni akteri predavači i studenti. Cilj je ovog rada bio da se uporede određeni aspekti studiranja prije i poslije uvođenja reformi na jednom od univerziteta u Bosni i Hercegovini. Na primjerima odabranih predmeta i načina njihovog izvođenja prije i poslije reformi na Univerzitetu u Banjoj Luci ukazano je na neke od promjena u sadržaju i organizaciji nastavnog i ispitnog procesa.

Ključne riječi: *Bolonjski proces, Univerzitet u Banjoj Luci, Bosna i Hercegovina*