

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE FOR SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION: LEARNING FROM THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

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*The Bologna Process aims to provide tools to connect the European national educational systems. The purpose of this paper is to analyze what we have learned and what challenges remain today. Since the beginning all participating countries had to agree on a comparable three cycle degree system for undergraduates (Bachelor degrees or Grades) and graduates (Master and PhD degrees) in order to create compatibility and comparability for achieving international competitiveness and a worldwide degree of attractiveness in higher education. The Bologna Declaration, originally signed by 29 countries, has now reached 47 countries, engaged in the process of creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), searching to be competitive to launch the European Academia of the 21st Century.*

*The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) has turned out to be the perfect tool to design, describe, and deliver programs and award higher education qualifications. Markets and European universities are going to be able to compete overseas in the future if the new regulations let them to create profitable business in the education area. As expected, European Universities have responded promptly and actively to the call.*

*In the case of small countries like Spain, it is an opportunity to internationalize Spanish universities; moreover, there is the opportunity for the expansion and consolidation of the Spanish language as the second most important foreign language. The 2009 Report highlights that early teaching of a foreign language is advancing in Europe. In lower secondary education, earlier teaching of English is becoming widespread; and the three Nordic countries, Germany, and the UK are the highest innovation performers. The result is a system of higher education more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and non-Europeans students and scholars. Reform is needed today if Europe wants to match the performance of the best performing higher education systems in the world. The English language seems to be the response in the search for a common European answer to solve common European problems.*

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### **Introductory notes**

The Bologna Process had the aim to create a *European Higher Education Area (EHEA)*. The year 2010 was the reference for achieving this goal since the beginning. More deeply the idea was to build a market for the European Public Education System. Even being so many countries and different cultures were involved in the challenge, with different heritage and tradition, the project is getting going further with the last incorporated countries that are right now participating in the whole network.

From the Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999, after ten years of willingness, we can talk of reaching *success* in the creation of a wide area of recognition and compatibility in University and Higher Education studies. Taking part in the Bologna Process initially was a voluntary decision (even if there were not many other choices) made by each country and its higher education community to endorse the principles underlined in the European Higher Education Area. The purpose of this paper is to analyze what we have learned from this important example of fast unification process and what is still the challenge today.

The Bologna Process did not aim to harmonize national educational systems but rather to provide *tools to connect* them. The intention initially was to allow the diversity of national systems and universities to be maintained while the European Higher Education Area was adding more transparency among national higher education systems. The key element was to implement tools in order to facilitate recognition of degrees and academic qualifications, mobility, and exchanges among the European institutions. The reforms were based on ten simple objectives which governments and institutions are still currently implementing. All participating countries had to agree on a comparable three cycle degree system for undergraduates (Bachelor degrees or Grades) and graduates (Master and PhD degrees). It was a duty to follow for whatever country wanting to be part of the big picture, following the general rules applying to the network.

### **Origins of the project and expected goals**

The Bologna Declaration was originally signed by 29 countries in order to reform the structures of their higher education systems in a convergent way. These countries who originally signed the initial agreement were: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Swiss Confederation, and the United Kingdom. All of them wanted to keep competitive in the launching the European Academia of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The Sorbonne declaration of 25th of May 1998 had previously stressed the Universities' central role in developing European cultural dimensions. It emphasized the creation of the European area of higher education as a key element to promote citizens' mobility and employability and the European Continent's overall development. Further than to achieve "greater compatibility and comparability in the national systems of higher education" (mainly an intra-European issue), the Declaration of Bologna wanted to increase "the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education". So it is important for European students themselves but for foreign students attending European education as well. The signatory countries explicitly expressed their goal to "ensure that the European higher education system acquires a worldwide degree of attractiveness equal to [Europe's] extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions".

According to the Bologna Declaration, Europe's response had to support the general principles laid down in the Sorbonne declaration, engaging coordinating of European policies to reach the main objectives considered to establish and promote the European system of higher education world-wide which were the following eight ones:

- Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens

*employability* (person's capability of gaining initial employment, maintaining employment, and obtaining new employment if required) and the international competitiveness.

- Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate.
- Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labor market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries.
- Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility.
- Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognized by receiving Universities concerned.
- Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement for students, access to study and training opportunities, and for teachers, researchers and administrative staff. Recognition and value of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training.
- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
- Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programs of study, training and research.

Following the process and getting further in the expansion, the whole area has been increased reaching now 47 countries engaged in the process of creating a European Higher Education Area. We could call it now the Euro-Asia Area according to which countries are now belonging to this “Knowledge Region”. The whole area now includes: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

It seems interesting to understand how much the Bologna Process has been revolutionary and how far the cooperation in European higher education could expand further of this experience. Markets and European universities are going to be able to compete overseas in the future if the new regulations let them to create profitable business in the education area. As expected, European Universities have responded promptly and actively to the call, but also the countries with near location to the European Union borders.

There are many potential students from countries belonging to South America, Australia or Asia who are investing their money (and/or their governments' money with grants and fellowships) in higher education for attending universities overseas. The opportunity cost for Europe now is very high. They are spending from 5 to 10 years in the United States of America when they used to come to Europe for that education in the past. Most of them wanted to improve their English language skills and knowledge at the same time that they develop their higher education studies. We have to consider seriously about how many

students, from China or Japan for example, used to come to Europe or only to the United Kingdom or France, but they are fighting today in order to be able to attend a US university today.

The United States of America is the largest economy in the OECD controlling this international market and would be the only one able to react to the magnitude and significance of the Bologna Process. We have to balance between running following the American model, an open door in the higher education system under which anyone with a high school diploma can enter some institutions that are classified as higher education. The European system is very competitive but not so open to foreign students. Exchange programs have helped a lot for creating the network that let students get official recognition; this would be the case of the ERASMUS program.

### **Main instrument in use for achieving the goal: the European Credit measure (ECTS)**

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) seems to have been a good choice for evaluating. ECTS is a tool that helps to design, describe, and deliver programs (or programmes) and award higher education qualifications. The use of ECTS, in conjunction with outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, makes programs and qualifications more transparent and facilitates the important recognition of qualifications. ECTS was introduced initially in 1989, being one of the cornerstones of the Bologna process, as a tool of the credit system for higher education used in the European Higher Education Area, involving all countries engaged in the Bologna Process. First used within the framework of Erasmus, later part of the Socrates program. ECTS was the only credit system which has been successfully tested and used across Europe. ECTS was set up initially for credit transfer. The system facilitated the recognition of periods of study abroad and thus enhanced the quality and volume of student mobility in Europe. Later ECTS was developed into an accumulation system to be implemented at institutional, regional, national and European level.

Recognition of prior learning is a key element in order to promote *lifelong learning* later. Potentially recognized as learning outcomes, ECTS credits describe what a *learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do* after successful completion of a process of learning. They relate to level descriptors in national and European qualifications frameworks. ECTS credits are based on the workload students, which indicate the time students typically need to complete all learning activities (such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, self-study and examinations) required to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

Two famous new concepts arrive: “learning outcomes” and “competences”, both used with different shades of meaning and in somewhat different frames of reference. In all cases they are related to what the learner supposedly will know, understand and be able to do at the end of a learning experience. Their widespread use is part of the shift in the arriving paradigm that places the *learner at the heart* of the higher education experience. This shift is the foundation basement of the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna Process and ECTS.

By standardizing the size of components and goals, institutions allow for more flexible, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary pathways among programs. On the other hand, the definition of learning outcomes within a component has been constrained by the

predefined number of credits that set *a priori* the workload for each component. Institutions have a lot of flexibility because they must consider the total time needed by students in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes with potentially several flexible learning paths.

The credit allocation to a new program or component should be validated according to national and/or institutional rules and should be regularly monitored. If evaluations reveal a discrepancy between the anticipated workload and the time actually taken by the majority of students to achieve the expected learning outcomes, becomes necessary a revision of the workload, learning outcomes or learning/teaching methods.

Anyway the big challenge is going to achieve *quality assurance*, which is going to be the primary responsibility for each institution. Taken together, internal quality assurance and external quality review (undertaken by quality assurance agencies) aim to implement *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Transparency and accessibility constitute the revolutionary elements for the whole of institutions and apply equally to language too. The publication should be available on the website, and not only in the local language, but preferably also in another widely-used language (which means English language more or less) in order to enhance transparency at international level too.

What becomes important then for institutions is how the new system encouraged them to publish on their *websites* their recognition policy and practices for all formal and informal learning. They have to adapt and renew all the information regarding the new concepts of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement. A “good Course Catalog” means to provide information on the Institution and the courses covering other important aspects in an official way. This effort of renovation and adaptation has represented probably the key factor for improving competition and creating an increasing market which conduct the whole system to modernization, applying to all European universities and educational institutions in general including the oldest and most famous ones.

### **Research on how countries are responding to the challenge: the case of Spain**

In the case of small countries like Spain, the challenge represented an opportunity for getting involved in a huge amazing project of internationalization of the Spanish universities. The best opportunity for Spain could be the expansion and consolidation of the Spanish language as a key element to take into account. Spanish is an important and extended world language, and the one with the highest current rate of growth. Spanish is also the official language used in many international organizations. The United States of America has now more Spanish speakers than Spain and, in fact, it is only surpassed by Mexico. Nowadays, Spain is the third country according to population speaking the Spanish language.

Perhaps the case of Spain does not represent the situation to emulate in Europe. Foreign students can choose to go to study in Spain as a second chance with around 400 million speakers, it is the third most spoken language in the world today, after Mandarin Chinese and English and it is an official language in 21 countries. Anyway, the first reference and the only relevant language in the international higher education right now perhaps is the English language.

Being a big old country at the time of the foundation of the first universities in Europe, Spain has the chance to participate in this knowledge heritage for reaching a better

position in the modern global context. So... 'the history of Spain's universities dates back to the beginning of the thirteenth century when the first university institutions were founded in the kingdoms of Castile and Leon, under the auspices of the *Cathedral Schools* of Palencia (between 1208 and 1214) and Salamanca (1218). During that century, many of the kingdoms in the Peninsula created their own *Studia Generale*. Institutions of this kind were established in Valladolid towards the middle of the century, in Lleida between 1279 and 1300, and in Alcalá in 1293. The greatest expansion took place between 1450 and 1625, with the opening of universities in Barcelona (1450), Santiago de Compostela (1495), Valencia (1499), Granada (1531) and Oviedo (1608).

In modern times, the Spanish university boom coincided with the process of decentralization following the ratification of the Spanish Constitution in 1978, as many sectors of society began to demand access to higher education for the first time. In 1984, Spain had 34 universities and 700,000 students. By 1995, almost a million and a half students were enrolled at a total of 51 universities, and five years later the number of universities had risen to 61. [...] Today, in 2011, the Spanish university system is made up of 76 public and private universities which offer students from Spain and abroad a broad-ranging, highly-regarded variety of courses at undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels'.

The Spanish site map (<http://www.universidad.es/>) reflects what are the important questions to be answered and other relevant information not so relevant for the big challenges:

- The Foundation (The Foundation Universidad.es / Contractor's profile / Presence abroad / Job opportunities / Documents).
- Universities (Spain's universities / Other teaching and research centres / Who is Who)
- Degrees (The Spanish university system / University admissions / Degrees / Degrees in foreign languages / The cost of studying in Spain)
- Research and innovation (Research / Innovation)
- Studying Spanish (Why study Spanish? / Before arriving / During your stay / Other co-official languages / Diplomas in Spanish (DELE-Diploma of Spanish as a Second Language)
- Information and resources (Before arrival / During your stay / Scholarships / Getting to know Spain)
- Fairs and events (Calendar) // Alumni Network // Online student and researcher service (Talk to us / Frequently asked questions) // Mapa web

**Conclusion: English is the only language and an advantage for Northern countries**

Sharing and exposing so much relevant information for all the universities will help students from all over the world and systems to improve and choose a better way. The first mandatory step is been developing by all the universities in Europe. The second step is to react to the big challenges and to implement a new policy according to the best practices that could be designed. The continuation of the reform process needs the acceptance among teachers and students but English seem to be the only important language for going ahead.

According to the 2009 Report is highlighted that early teaching of foreign language is advancing in Europe. In lower secondary education, earlier teaching of English is becoming widespread. The three Nordic countries (SE, FI, DK), Germany, and the UK

are the highest innovation performers as measured by the European Innovation Scoreboard and a strong concentration of the “creative class” with high educational attainment in and around capital cities contributes to the performance.

In the whole region students are supposed to be able to choose from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses and, more important, they would benefit from smooth recognition procedures. The Bologna Declaration of 1999 has put in motion a series of reforms needed to make European Higher Education more compatible and comparable being applied simultaneously in all the countries involved. The result would be a system of higher education more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and non-Europeans, for students and scholars coming from other continents. Reform is needed today if Europe wants to match the performance of the best performing systems in the world, notably following at least the United States and Asia education systems.

The Declaration reflected a search for a common European answer to solve common European problems. The process originated from the recognition that in spite of their valuable differences and language limitations, European higher education systems were facing common internal and external challenges related to the growth and diversification of higher education, the employability of graduates, the shortage of skills in key areas, the expansion of private and transnational education, etc. The Declaration recognized the value of coordinated reforms, compatible systems and common needed action.

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[http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc1290\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc1290_en.htm)

2. EURYDICE - The information network on education in Europe

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5. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) official website

<http://www.ehea.info/>

6. The official Bologna Process website July 2007 - June 2010

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>

7. The Teaching International Students Project

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/teachingandlearning/internationalisation/bologna>

8. Universities in Spain

<http://www.universidad.es/universities>