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Bologna Process and Anadolu University Open Education System

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Abstract

In today's world, many significant changes occur in the field of higher education just like in other fields. Increasing the quality of higher education, ensuring the transparency and comparability of sustainable education systems at international level and the attempts to make such systems more practical and easily adaptable are the significant dynamics of such changes. Considered as a mega university in the world with its well-established open and distance education system, Anadolu University provides education services for almost half of the students enrolled in Turkish Higher Education system. Since it is a system providing services for more than 30 years, it is now inevitable to initiate a restructuring process according to these certain changes, for which Bologna Process has been an important trigger. The main scope of this study is to examine the changes observed in Anadolu University open and distance education system in parallel with the attempts to adopt Bologna Process.

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1. Introduction

Today, we are experiencing “information age”, in which the role of universities at social and economic level has gained considerable importance. Therefore; it is clear that economic, scientific and technological developments require the initiation of effective restructuring processes in higher education systems. Moreover, the demand for higher education is also increasing during information age, which makes it necessary for higher education systems to develop their own accountable and transparent processes.

As the inevitable effects of all these developments, the higher education systems all over the world are now going through various transformation processes. Many countries have already initiated regional

collaboration units in order to compare their own higher education systems with others and to find common solutions. The most comprehensive of all such collaboration attempts is Bologna process initiated in order to create a “Common European Higher Education Area” in Europe. The number of member countries in Bologna Process is currently 47, and Turkey joined the process in 2001. In Turkey, “Council of Higher Education” has the first degree responsibility to apply the process and do the necessary audits.

Anadolu University, which is a higher education institution well equipped with necessary scientific knowledge, academic experience, quality human resources and technical and technological infrastructure conforming to international standards, was entitled to provide open and distance education in Turkey according to the law numbered 41 enacted on July 20th 1982. The worldwide changes in information and communication technology, increasing demand for open and distance education, emergence of learner-centered educational approaches, Bologna Process, the amendments made in legal regulations now require the restructuring of the programs providing centralized open and distance education at Anadolu University. The current study examines this ongoing restructuring process in the faculties providing open and distance education at Anadolu University.

2. Bologna Process and Its Development

The first steps of Bologna Process were taken in 1998 when Sorbonne Declaration was published after the meeting held with the presence of Ministers of Education of France, Italy, Germany and England. This was the first time when the idea of creating a “Common Higher Education Area” in Europe emerged. The Bologna Declaration, signed by the ministers responsible for higher education systems in 29 European countries at the meeting held in Bologna, Italy, in 1999, started the Bologna Process (Erdoğan 2010, 3).

While the Sorbonne Common Declaration dated 1998 was signed by only four countries (Germany, France, United Kingdom and Italy), a total of 29 countries were represented at the meeting held in Bologna in 1999. This number increased to 40 in Berlin Summit held in 2003 and then reached 46 with the addition of five more countries and “European Commission”, which was treated as if it was a participant country. London and Leuven meetings did not receive any applications for participation; however, the total number of member countries became 47 at Bologna member countries’ meetings held in Vienna and Budapest in 2010 (Gümrükçü and Epskamp 2011, 13).

2.1. Action Lines of Bologna Process

The action lines of Bologna Process can be listed as follows (Gümrükçü and Epskamp 2011, 79):

- adopting clear and comparable higher education diploma and degree criteria (developing Diploma Supplement practice to achieve that purpose)
- adopting a three-cycle system in higher education; namely undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate cycles
- adopting European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)
- promoting the mobility of students and academicians across Europe
- applying and promoting quality assurance systems network
- improving European dimension in higher education
- encouraging lifelong learning
- promoting active participation of students and higher education institutions in the process

- promoting the attractiveness of European Higher Education Area
- establishing a strategic cooperation between European Research Area and European Higher Education Area.

Bologna Process is a structured and continuously evaluated one. The first and the highest political level of the process at international level is the meeting of European ministers who are responsible for higher education in their own countries. This meeting is held once in every two years and the current situation is analyzed, new targets are determined and public is informed about the resolutions via declarations and publications. The second political level of the process involves Bologna Follow-up Group, which consists of the delegates responsible for higher education in the countries involved in Bologna Process. The presidency of the group is handed over when EU presidency changes. There are some members who consult this political structure which consists of ministers and Bologna Follow-up Group national delegates. There is a board of directors that prepares and organizes BFUG meetings held twice a year. The members of BFUG are responsible for the development and audit of Bologna Process actions carried out in their own countries and across Europe (Edinsel 2008, 7).

3. Adoption of Bologna Process in Turkish Higher Education

The adoption of Bologna Process at national level means a lot of significant responsibilities to be assumed by many stakeholders, especially higher education institutions. In Turkey, The Council of Higher Education is responsible for the adoption and the audit of the process. The Council considers Bologna Process as an appropriate tool to restructure the higher education system; and therefore, carries out many actions to ensure the recognizability of higher education institutions at international level and increase their quality. Some of these actions are sponsored by European Commission and carried out within the framework of “National Team of Bologna Experts Project” initiated in 2004. The others are carried out by the commissions established by the Council of Higher Education, and the actions aim at involving all higher education institutions in Turkey in the process (Erdoğan 2010, 14).

The main objective of National Team of Bologna Experts Project is to extend and activate Bologna Process at national level in collaboration with other “national teams of experts” established in each country. Every year, the project developed within the framework of annual plans by the authorities responsible for the higher education system of each country and the “team of experts” chosen to carry out the project are presented to European Commission for approval and later following the approval, the activities determined are initiated. The related project term expires following the submission of conclusion report and a proposal for a new project is submitted to European Commission based on the projected priorities at national level for the next year (Edinsel 2008, 14).

In Bologna Process, it is projected that the developments should be examined across individual countries and Europe through “Trends” and “Stocktaking” reports submitted once in every two years. The first Stocktaking report in Bergen in 2005 was revised in London in 2007 with the inclusion of new topics, and the development levels of countries regarding Bologna Process actions were analyzed. In this respect, the development experienced by Turkey in 2005 and 2007 regarding Bologna activities are displayed in Table 1 (Edinsel 2008, 10).

Table 1. The Development of Turkey regarding Bologna Process Actions

Study Topics	Begen 2005	London 2007
Quality Assurance	Medium (2.00)	Very Good (4.00)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National quality system competent with European Higher Education The criteria used and external evaluation system Student participation International participation 	Medium (2) Medium (2) Medium (2) Medium (2)	Perfect (5) Very Good (4) Very Good (4) Good (3)
Grading System	Perfect (4.67)	Very Good (4.33)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application of dual system Passing from grade 1 to grade 2 The number of students in dual system The framework of national requirements 	Perfect (5) Very Good (4) Perfect (5) ----	Perfect (5) Perfect (5) --- Good (3)
Diploma and Accreditation of Durations of Education	Very Good (3.67)	Very Good (4.33)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diploma Supplement Lisbon Convention (recognition) European Credit Transfer System 	Very Good (4) Good (3) Very Good (4)	Very Good (4) Very Good (4) Perfect (5)
Lifelong Learning		Good (3.00)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accreditation of Previous Education System 		Good (3)
Common Degrees		Perfect (5.00)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determining common degrees and accreditation 		Perfect (5)
GENERAL	Good (3.45)	Very Good (4.13)

The comparison of mean scores of Turkey with those of the countries participating Bologna Process is shown in the figures below (Edinsel 2008, 14).

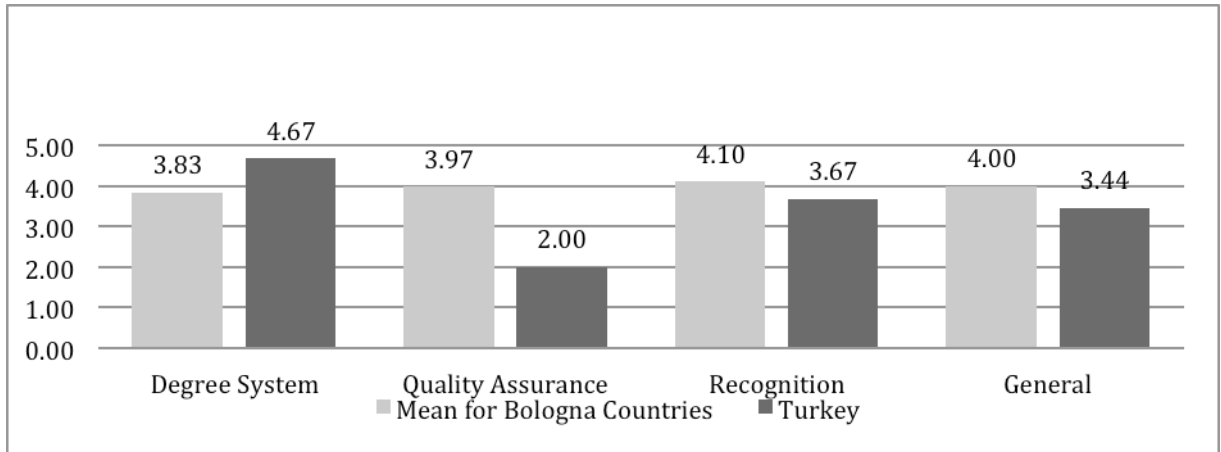


Fig. 1- The comparison of development level of Turkey with Bologna Countries in terms of Bologna Process Actions according to 2005 Bergen Stocktaking Report

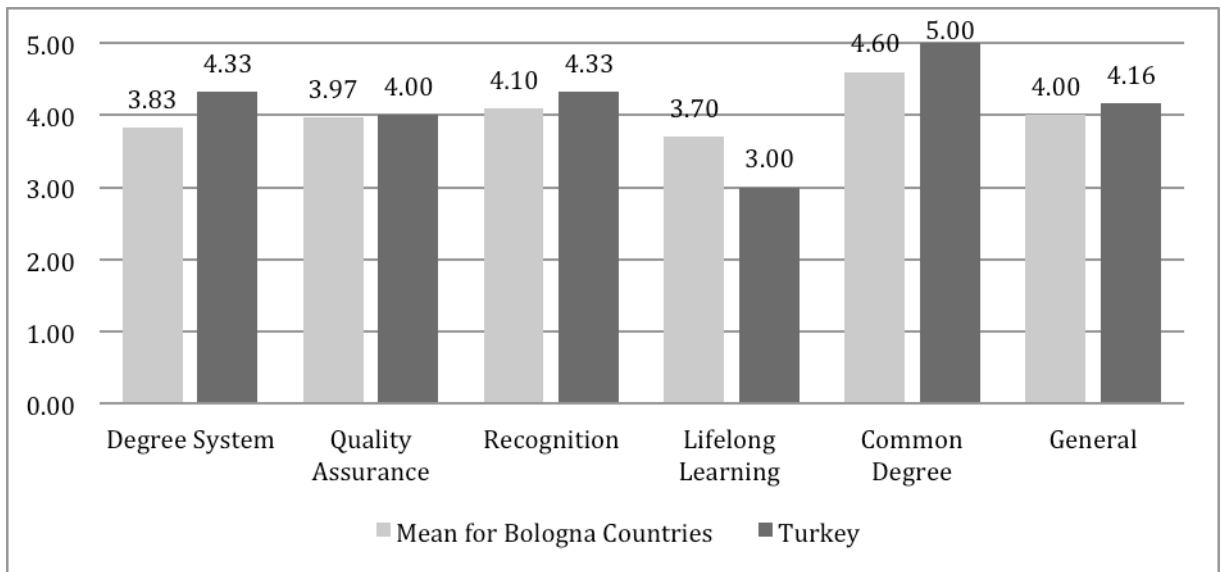


Fig. 2- The comparison of development level of Turkey with Bologna Countries in terms of Bologna Process Actions according to 2007 London Stocktaking Report

4. Open and Distance Education at Anadolu University

Anadolu University, which is well equipped with necessary scientific knowledge, academic experience, quality human resources and technical and technological infrastructure conforming to international standards, was entitled to provide open and distance education in Turkey in 1982 through the related law. Initiated as a part of Communication Sciences Faculty, open and distance education system at Anadolu University now carries out these responsibilities with all its faculties and educational units in collaboration with the academicians from other universities and experts (coursebook writing, scenario

writing for TV programs and shooting, academic counselling services) (Curabay and Demiray 2002, 24). In addition, the legal regulation stipulates: “the students and the graduates of open education and formal education of the same departments have the same rights and authorization”

While the demand for higher education in Turkey was 420 000 in 1981, the number of students who were able to obtain the right to enter universities was only 54 000. In other words, the universities of the period were able to meet only 13 % of the existing demand. On the other hand, the advancements in education technology encouraged the idea that education should not be limited to classrooms only; therefore the application of an open and distance education system was necessary. These ideas were put into practice and Anadolu University Open Education Faculty started to provide education as the first faculty in Turkey according to open and distance education system principles in 1982-83 academic year. Aiming the provision of equal education opportunities at high standards in higher education, the faculty had 29.500 students in Economics and Business Administration undergraduate program in its first year, which clearly showed the considerable demand for higher education and open and distance education model.

Between 1982 and 1993, the demand for Open Education offered by Anadolu University considerably increased. In addition to the undergraduate programs in Business Administration and Economics, a protocol was signed with the Ministry of Education giving more than 200 000 teachers the opportunity for associate degree and Undergraduate Degree Completion Program. Moreover, the citizens of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus were also given the right to register in these programs. Following the protocol signed with Ministry of Health, two-year Nursing, Midwifery and Health Techicianship associate degree Program was established; and Agriculture and Veterinary associate degree Program was opened according to the protocol signed with the Ministry of Agriculture. In 1987, undergraduate and associate degree programs were initiated for Turkish citizens living abroad in different cities of Europe within the framework of the project titled “West Europe Project”.

In 1993, open and distance education system was restructured through a legal regulation according to the changing needs of the period. Economics and Business Administration Programs were upgraded into 4-year “Economics” and “Business Administration” Faculties. A total of 17 associate degree programs were established at Open Education Faculty between 1993 and 1997.

Organized and carried out by ÖSYM (Student Selection and Placement Center) at the beginning, Open Education Exams started to be held by Anadolu University as of 1996. Another important date in the history of Open Education system in Turkey is 1998, which initiated a new period in which new structures carrying open and distance education beyond its classical functions were put into practice and modern communication technologies – mainly internet - were used due to changing technological conditions and student needs. In 1993-1994 academic year, Undergraduate Degree Completion Program practice started in collaboration with the “Council of Higher Education” in order to ensure the integration of Open Education system to formal (face –to – face) higher education.

A total of 12 new associate degree programs were established at Open Education Faculty between 1998 and 2008.

In 1998, the Faculty’s official webpage <http://www.aof.anadolu.edu.tr> started to provide various services for students, which is followed by the publishing of “Internet-based practice tests” to prepare students for the exams in 1999. Anadolu University open and distance education system established a video-conferencing environment via satellites and terrestrial broadcasting lines by collaborating with other universities. As of

1999, TV programs titled “Preparing for Exams” are broadcast on the national state-run TV channel prior to midterms, finals and make-up exams; one week live and one week taped programs.

For the purposes of adapting to newly developing conditions in 2001-2002 academic year, “Second University” application was initiated, which provided opportunities to have an alternative education for those already attending a formal education program or having graduated but aspiring to improve himself/herself in various topics.

A total of 22 new programs in various study fields - 5 undergraduate and 17 associate degree were developed in the faculties providing open and distance education in 2009-2010 academic year.

5. Structure of Anadolu University Open and Distance Education System

Anadolu University open and distance education system consists of three faculties; namely “Open Education”, “Economics” and “Business Administration”. There are 48 associate degree programs, 6 undergraduate departments and 3 Undergraduate Degree Completion Programs at “Open Education Faculty”; 5 undergraduate departments at “Faculty of Economics”; and 2 departments offering undergraduate education at “Faculty of Business Administration”.

There are various ways to enroll in the faculties of open and distance education system. Among those are “centralized exam organized by ÖSYM (Student Selection and Placement Center)”; “YÖS (International Student Entrance Exam) administered by the university”, “undergraduate degree completion program”, “transfer from other university” and “second university”. In 2011-2012 academic year, the numbers of students registered in the programs and departments having academic year-based system are as follows for each faculty: Open Education Faculty 77.222; Faculty of Economics 74.410; and Faculty of Business Administration 157.429. The current total numbers of enrolled students at these faculties are as follows for each faculty: “Open Education Faculty” 303.094; “Faculty of Economics” 391.376; and “Faculty of Business Administration” 599.098.

Similarly, the number of students enrolled in semester/credit-based system at the programs and departments of Open Education Faculty in 2011-2012 academic year is 109.784. The total number of currently enrolled students in such programs and departments is 229.340. Accordingly, overall total number of students enrolled in the system or having the right to be enrolled when the tuition fee is paid is 1.941.753.

6. Bologna Process in Anadolu University Open and Distance Education System and Restructuring Process

As mentioned above, Anadolu University open and distance education system has been offering various programs at different faculties for more than 30 years. This system has continuously developed with the addition of new enrollment types and integration of various educational methods. However, when the main features of the system are examined, a restructuring process is inevitable. In the past, education was on academic year-basis, and the assessment required an absolute passing grade, in other words the credits given to courses were not taken into consideration. In addition, there were not any elective courses and the students did not have the option to select the courses they want to take. These weaknesses produced a negative image for Anadolu University open and distance education system as an isolated one from overall higher education system. In short, both internal and external dynamics required an urgent restructuring in the system. Recent legal regulations in Turkish Higher Education system stipulate the adoption of semester and credit –based system. The attempts to integrate Turkish Higher Education

System into European Higher Education Area via Bologna Process constitute the external dynamics of this restructuring process.

The main objectives of restructuring process have been determined as follows:

- Having two semesters in open and distance education system.
- Defining European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for each individual course.
- Writing educational goals and objectives for the programs, determining learning outcomes, making lesson plans and revising course and program contents
- Adopting an assessment system based on ECTS credit values rather than a system requiring an absolute passing grade

In addition to these main objectives, rewriting of all course books and updating e-learning environments have been planned in parallel with the restructuring process. At the end of this process, a new education model having the following features will be available: focusing on mass education, transparent, creditable, dynamic, learner-centered, using modern technology, interactive, flexible, meeting the labor force demand of the country, reaching individuals at all ages through its lifelong learning philosophy, and contributing to the recognizability and popularity of the system and the program.

To achieve this purpose, firstly, a three-year process has been planned for the restructuring of open and distance education. This process is defined as “transformation to semester / credit system” in open and distance education system. Open Education Faculty Theology associate degree program has been chosen for the first program to be transformed and semester / credit system was used in the program for 2010 – 2011 academic year. Later, other 13 programs having different education models (internship, practicum courses, face-to-face education) were transformed into credit system. In the last year of the process, that is 2012-2013 academic year, all the programs and departments – 13 undergraduate, 48 associate degree and 3 undergraduate degree completion programs– at Open Education, Economics and Business Administration Faculties – will be transformed into credit system.

Most of the programs to be transformed have been redesigned according to predetermined basic field requirements, and later learning outcomes of all the courses have been determined in a way to meet the program requirements, and finally, coursebooks and learning materials have been revised or replaced with new ones.

Approximately 500 courses have been transformed into credit system in the departments and programs, course contents have been revised and the number of courses increased to more than 1000 with the addition of new courses to the programs.

All the courses in the programs and departments have been revised by the academicians who are experts in the field. As a result, up-to-date and rich contents have been prepared accordingly.

Adaptation procedures (grade conversions, assigning the students to new courses etc.) of nearly 2 million students enrolled in the system have been completed.

As a requirement of Bologna process, ECTS credits were determined for all courses. In order to achieve accurate results, the students were given questionnaires for all the courses and the credits were determined according to the data obtained from these surveys. Anadolu University was honored with ECTS Label given by European Commission to the higher education institutions that apply ECTS in all

undergraduate and graduate programs successfully and accurately. This label increases the prestige and quality of the institution.

As another practice of Bologna Process, “Diploma Supplement” is given by the institutions in addition to diplomas. As a result, the degree obtained from open education system is accreditable by other institutions and organizations. Diploma supplement helps students to certify the talents and skills they acquired during their education life. Anadolu University has been awarded Diploma Supplement Label Award by European Commission the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency – EACEA. This award is given to higher education institutions that can give free of charge Diploma Supplement written in a commonly spoken European language (English) correctly and automatically to their students who complete an undergraduate or graduate program.

7. Conclusion

Anadolu University open and distance education has been playing an important role in meeting social needs and the demands for higher education for 30 years. However; restructuring of the system has been a must due to the changing conditions of today’s world. Adoption of Bologna Process has been determined as the ultimate goal in this restructuring process. As mentioned in the action lines of Bologna Process, the objectives of restructuring process are as follows: adopting clear and comparable higher education diploma and degree criteria (developing Diploma Supplement practice to achieve that purpose); determining European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits for all the courses in the programs and departments; applying and promoting quality assurance systems network; encouraging lifelong learning; and placing Turkey in European Higher Education Area by meeting all the requirements. Keeping these objectives in mind, the adaptation procedures of nearly 2 million students in all programs and departments to this new structure have been completed. Restructuring of Anadolu University open and distance education system, which can be considered as a mega organization due to considerably high numerical figures, will be an exemplary practice for other higher education institutions as well. The first two years of restructuring process has been completed successfully and is projected to be fully completed in the last year. After the completion of the process, an exemplary open and distance education system will be established which is suitable for the needs of the time and fully integrated to higher education systems at both national and international levels.

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