Challenges in the Implementation of the Bologna Process: Focusing on Three Universities of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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ABSTRACT

Bologna process is the instruction for reshaping in the higher education system, which created significant obstacles for its implementation. The objective of this study is to investigate the issues and challenges faced Kurdistan universities during the implementation of the Bologna process. In this study, three universities have been focused; two public and a private university. A questionnaire form was designed or the three universities' staff (Erbil Polytechnic University [EPU], Soran University, and Cihan University) which included several questions about the challenges faced them during European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) implementation. The results show that Cihan University provides more knowledge about Bologna process to its staff while EPU and Cihan University were the best regarding staff participation in Bologna process and related events such as conferences, workshops, and seminars. EPU shows to be preferable in providing ECTS instructions While Cihan University tends to be better followed the policy of ECTS. Most Universities’ staff disagreed about the success of the Bologna process implementation due to unsuitable universities’ infrastructure and academic calendar. In conclusion, in point of view of the universities’ staff, several steps have been taken toward the implementation of Bologna process, but it required more preparations and efforts.

Keywords: Challenges, Implementation, Bologna Process

INTRODUCTION

Globalization of knowledge made the Europeans higher education to start reform and reconsideration of a traditional system by signing the 1999 European Bologna Process higher education reform (Mngo, 2019). Two decades ago, the decision of the reform was made and it has grown in its membership from 29 countries to 48 countries today (Bergan and Deca, 2018).

Bologna process was managed and discussed formally throughout the Bergen Ministerial Summit in 2005 (Klemenčič, 2019). The area of higher education was created by the cooperation of European governments. The design and implementation of the Bologna process were clear in the Bologna declaration in 1999, which should affect outside Europe (Bologna, 1999). According to the declaration, he Bologna process should be recognized for the international competitiveness of higher education in European systems (Marquand and Scott, 2018).

It is a new project that was created from the European Higher education Area (HEA) between some European countries in early times (Terry, 2008). The declaration was signed in 2010. The Bologna process was developed over 10 years and the number of countries that implement this process and it reached more than 48 countries (Terry, 2007). The major goal of the declaration has been to restructure some lines in European higher education such as mobility of higher education staff, students and expand quality assurance efforts for a three-cycle degree such as Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate.

The development of the Bologna process changed the system of higher education in Europe due to the participation of massive European countries. The key aim of the process is to create a unified higher education area in Europe (Dobbins and Knill, 2014).

The Bologna process has many principles, for example, construction of outcomes and competences among European students, focusing on the recognition that students can study anywhere, develop quality assurance, and improve general and good curricular standards (Huismann, 2019).

According to (Mngo, 2019), the Bologna process investigates opportunities for the purpose of developing
educational and socio-economic partnership, including the exchange of knowledge, technology; and resources.

**Aim of the Study**

This study has been conducted to investigate the challenges and issues that face Bologna process implementation in three universities in Iraqi Kurdistan region, namely Erbil Polytechnic University (EPU), Soran University, and Cihan Private University.

**METHODOLOGY**

The online questionnaire was adopted in this study, and it was designed to investigate the perceptions of the university’s academic staff about the implementation and challenges of Bologna Process in the region. As part of the testing of the questionnaire, a draft version was shared with experts for improving the style and nature of studied issues. After the necessary revisions were done, the final version of the questionnaire was prepared in second semester of testing Bologna process in the studied universities. The survey was administered entirely via electronic mail or through sending links of the questionnaire form through other social media official groups such as Messenger, Viber, and WhatsApp. The selected participants were 146 members of three local universities as the study sample. The responses of the online Google Forms were collected and organized in a Google sheet and an Excel sheet. The response of the questionnaire arranged was based on the organization, qualification, and field of study.

Statistical analysis was done by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program (Version 21). The row data were converted to percent values and presented as charts and a Chi-square test was utilized to compare data. The variables considered for categorizing study data were: The University, the respondent qualifications and the type of the field which the study samples are specialized in.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results revealed that there is a significant magnitude among the universities in implementing of the Bologna process in Erbil governorate of the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

Figure 1 illustrates the degree of knowledge that university staff possess regarding the concept of Bologna process. The data showed that Cihan University was more likely to provide knowledge about subject rather than other two public universities.

There were significant differences ($P < 0.05$) among the universities regarding staffs’ participation in events related to Bologna process. The priority was given to Cihan University as they had been in several workshops which made them more knowledgeable, while Polytechnic University staff were apparent in participation of Conferences [Figure 2].

However, improvement occurred in higher education system in Kurdistan regional government (KRG), but it seems that implementation of Bologna process in the universities of KRG still requires more adaptations. The overall data revealed that more than half of aforementioned universities staff reported the unfavorable condition of European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) implementation [Figure 3]. The reason could be inconsistency in the policy of higher education management, especially in the issues associated to the infrastructure setting of the universities and quality assurance (Mahmood, 2021).

The results of Figure 4 revealed that there is a significant difference between Cihan University and EPU. The results of statistics showed that ($P < 0.05$) regarding providing instructions to the university staff, EPU recorded 85%, while Cihan and Soran Universities recorded 81% and 48%, respectively. The data about implementation of the ECTS instructions reported that Cihan University followed a better policy for managing the instructions through their events. This might be due to the competence, for gaining a better national ranking.

Numerous investigations have focused on the challenges faced the implementation of ECTS. In this study, 12 issues have been reported as major challenges which were observed to be investigated in the universities of KRI. It has been realized that the most challengeable issues are related to physical environment of universities and the number of students per hall, in addition to problems in real academic calendar [Figure 5].

The result showed that more than 90% of staff in both public universities agreed that overcrowded lecture halls and equipment required for implementing ECTS were the main challenges [Figure 6]. While more than 80% were found to agree that the buildings and overcrowded halls issues were the main challenges.

According to the percent values of the responses, the students’ satisfaction including online services and student skills on MLS was shown to be challenge issues. The staff of all studied universities reported the student service as real challenge with approximately 90%. The factor of time was obviously recorded among the main challenges (Kettunen and Kantola, 2006). Number of real teaching weeks in university academic calendar was
also found to be inadequate for implementation with percent values (88.4%, 82.1%, 63.6%) in EPU, Soran and Cihan respectively [Figures 5 and 6]. Various challenges can be found in other fields of education such as theses aspects; compatibility, comparability, and harmonization (Heitmann, 2005).

The impact of qualification of university staff was analyzed. Both higher qualification and higher satisfaction towards university infrastructure is about 23% of PhD agreed that their university infrastructure was suitable for applying Bologna process, while all bachelor degree staff thought that their universities were not convenient for implementation [Figure 7]. Most of faculty staff which work in lab (BSc and Diploma) were better in taking responsibility and completing assignment than PhD and MSc holders who implemented the assignment in lectures.

Figure 1: Distribution of university staffs’ depending on their knowledge and background about Bologna process. (a) Aware of the Bologna Process. (b) Field do you teach European Credit Transfer System. (c) Understanding of the Bologna process. (d) Bologna process comes from. (e) The content of the Bologna process. (f) Concepts of the Bologna process
Figure 2: Distribution of university staffs’ depending on their participations in Bologna process related events like Conferences, workshops, seminars etc

Figure 3: Percentage of university staff’s opinion about capability of implementation of Bologna process in the universities
Figure 4: Distribution of university staffs' according to possessing the instructions on implementation of Bologna process in the three studied universities

Figure 5: The national challenges that face the implementation of bologna process in the three studied universities
Figure 6: The challenges related to teaching hall environment that face the implementation of the Bologna process in the three studied universities

Figure 7: Distribution of studied universities staffs' opinion towards Bologna process implementation according to their qualification
The study targets various fields in the research questionnaire. According to the results, pure science showed to be the most challengeable class compared with the other fields of study. Only (5%) of pure science staff answered “Yes” for a question “Do you think the infrastructure of your university has ability to implement the Bologna process which reflects their notion towards the capacity of your university?” [Figure 8]. The field of human sciences seem to face more challenges in applying the content of Bologna process and completing the assignments required for implementation (Öhlén et al., 2011).
The findings of data analysis of this study revealed that Bologna process is somehow complex as it involves European and national levels. (Veiga and Amaral, 2006) in their study also found that Bologna process as a top down linear policy implementation process which means it faces challenges at several different levels.

**CONCLUSION**

To sum up, the staff of Cihan University is shown more knowledge concerning Bologna process to its members. Meanwhile, the staff of EPU and Cihan University were regarded best in taking part in Bologna process events. On the other hand, EPU is seen to be more preferred in giving ECTS instructions compared to Cihan University which tends to better follow the ECTS policy.

The success of Bologna process was denied by most of universities staff members via lack of good infrastructure of the universities and the academic calendar. It can be concluded that more preparation and effort is required to implement the Bologna process.

- The results of the found that Cihan University staff seem to be more knowledgeable about ECTS compared to the other to public universities
- Cihan University Staff had been in several workshops compared to the other two public universities. Meanwhile the EPU Staff had participated in conferences more than the other two
- When managing instructions of ECTS are taken into consideration, the data showed that Cihan University followed a better policy through their events
- Moreover, 90% of the staff in both public universities agreed that the main challenges for implementing ECTS were over-crowded lectures halls and lack of necessary equipment
- The results found that the field of human sciences faces more challenges when it comes to applying Bologna Process and the required assignments for implementing ECTS than the other fields.

**REFERENCES**


