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Study Regarding the Impact of the Bologna Process on Physical Education and Sport Higher Education in Romania

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Abstract

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The Bologna process, as a result of numerous studies regarding the organization of university programs, has led to the development of several activities, measures and actions aimed at implementing certain resolutions given by the decision makers of European countries. We believe that our study is an interesting synthesis of the impact caused by the implementation of decisions related to the Bologna process 10 years after its initiation. The aim of this study is to highlight directions, opportunities, transformations and trends for the future, determined by the implementation of the Bologna process in the Physical Education and Sports domain. For this study, the SWOT method was used as a main method of research. The analysis of our data led us to believe that the goal has been achieved. Thus, we found that several documents pertaining to the legislative package regarding the systematization of education on three cycles of study programs at university level (Bachelor, Master, PhD studies) have been developed and approved, and new standards for Bachelor and Master, as well as the code for PhD studies, were also developed and implemented, etc. The instructional-educational process has been updated to a student-centred approach. We appreciate the results to be particularly beneficial in terms of the internationalization of studies, students and teacher mobility, the emergence of community programs, the development of cooperation areas between universities and research institutes from Europe, the European Economic Community and the Swiss Confederation.

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1. Introduction

The Bologna process, as a result of numerous studies regarding the organization of university programs, has led to the development of several activities, measures and actions aimed at implementing certain resolutions given by the decision makers of European countries.



We consider that talking about the impact of Bologna process is very difficult, because of the many changes, adjustments and harmonisations that have occurred in the last 10 years, on the one hand, and the numerous related documents that have been drafted during this period, on the other hand.

“The Bologna process, initiated with the Bologna Declaration (1999) and assessed every 3 years in ministerial conferences, aims to introduce a more comparable, compatible and coherent system for European higher education” (*The Bologna process*, 2015).

Official documents of the European Commission (EC) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) drew the attention of higher education institutes and decisions makers towards some aspects considered of major importance to the education systems and domains in all countries, such as: the structuring and organization of all systems in cycles able to promote the mobility of students, teachers and researchers, easier recognition of studies, the obtaining of diplomas and related qualifications, student-centred teaching, high-quality learning and teaching assurance, lifelong learning, employability, funding, international openness, data collection. Until now, 47 countries have joined the Bologna process and have launched specific programs for implementation. We consider that three stages are involved in its adoption:

- implementation;
- consolidation;
- perfecting and refining the process.

Today, the academic world is very much aware of the hard work and sustained effort necessary for the coherent adoption of the established ideas expressed in the Declaration of Bologna.

“A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space” (The European Higher Education Area, 1999).

Since the first 30 countries expressed their willingness to make major changes in the higher education area by signing the Declaration of Bologna, the number increased to 47 countries which have adopted the Bologna measures.

“All the provisions of the Bologna Declaration were set as measures of voluntary harmonisation process, not as clauses of a binding contract” (The European Higher Education Area, 2014). When talking about the Bologna process, we argue that two dimensions stand out: external and internal.

In respect to the external dimension, Bologna established “the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European systems of higher education and claimed to ensure a worldwide degree of attraction” (Zgaga, 2006). This refers not only to the harmonization of education systems at a European level, but also to the adoption of changes aimed at optimizing the higher education systems of each signatory country, of which Romania is part.

Internal aspects are related to each country’s educational policy and system, and to each university.

There were many aspects to be discussed, numerous tools to implement and decisions to make. Many conferences, working groups or forums were organized.

One of these very important meetings was the Ministerial Conference held in Bucharest, Romania, on 26-27 April 2012, during the world economic crisis (EHEA Ministerial Conference, 2012). It was attended by 47 European Ministers responsible for higher education in their countries. The final report states that “the Ministers agreed to focus on three main goals in the face of the economic crisis: to provide quality higher education to more students, to better equip students with employable skills, and to increase student mobility”. All participants agreed that “investing in higher education for the future Europe is undergoing an economic and financial crisis with damaging societal effects” (Zgaga, 2006) mostly related to the employment of graduates with a university degree.

We agree that the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) offers support to countries and their educational areas, and an easier way for the recognition of studies carried out in European universities or in the world, as well as a means for reducing youth unemployment.

Between 2012 and 2015, the efforts were directed towards adopting the changes according to the Bologna lines. In the next period, a sustained effort focusing on the social dimension of increased access to education is necessary. Consequently, more needs to be done as regards the implementation of quality measures, open access to education, flexible learning paths, the promotion of student-centred approach and learning outcomes, the support and diversification of lifelong educational programs, modernizing teaching methods, increasing the research and innovation contribution to the learning means, funding assurance and raising the university’s importance for the economy and community life.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some aspects regarding the implementation of Bologna process in the Romanian Physical Education and Sport Higher Education.

2. Materials and methods

To achieve the purpose of the paper, qualitative documentary analysis and the SWOT methods were applied.

The National University of Physical Education and Sports in Bucharest (UNEFS) is the higher education institution participating in the study. UNEFS was chosen because it has organized and led the implementation of the Bologna decisions in the Physical Education and Sport education field from the very beginning.

In this respect, it organized and led many workshops and working groups to promote the Bologna concepts and requirements, to set out the measures for each step and design the necessary documents.

We analysed numerous documents designed and developed during 2004-2015 concerning the Romanian Physical Education and Sport Educational System. Thus, the conceptual framework and measures for the implementation of the three study cycles, the quality assurance tools, specific standards, curricula, subject sheets, diploma recognition, student and teacher mobility, new directions, paths and topics for international collaboration were set up.

The SWOT applied to implement the Bologna process program at the National University of Physical Education and Sports from Bucharest highlights important aspects concerning its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

3. Results

Strengths:

- A new structure, based on three study cycles (Bachelor, Master, PhD), has been established for the Physical Education and Sport Higher Education System;
- Study duration has been set at 3(B) + 2(M) + 3(D) years;
- The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has been adopted;
- New specific standards for Physical Education and Sport Higher Education have been developed;
- New tools for evaluation and quality assurance have been developed and applied;
- Larger freedom in choosing the educational route has been granted;
- Lifelong training programs for adults have been designed and implemented;
- The conditions for EU harmonization and recognition of studies have been created;
- The possibility of access to the international labour market has increased.

Weaknesses:

- Education time constraints especially at Bachelor level;
- Lack of specialization at Bachelor level;
- Insufficient hours allocated for the independent study programs;
- Few tools for monitoring individual study;
- Underfunding of the Physical Education and Sport educational area.

Opportunities:

- Facilitation of the access to university studies for a larger category of people;
- Lower levels of discrimination based on age, geographical area and other dimensions;
- Increased access to information and learning resources;
- The possibility of continuing studies after the Master's and PhD degree;
- Obtaining competences through Traineeships in different curricula;
- The possibility of studying at prestigious universities across the EU and worldwide, according to students' options;
- The possibility of obtaining scholarships based on professional performance.

Threats:

- Time constraints impeding the study of all disciplines considered necessary for a solid basic preparation;
- Level I shift from formative to informative;
- A decrease in students' interest and motivation for learning, and dropout of studies;
- Insufficient infrastructure, upgrading and teaching methods to increase the graduates' training level.

In the last four years, the academic staff and managerial structures have designed, developed and approved numerous documents included in the UNEFS Strategic Plan for implementing and improving

the Bologna process. Therefore, a large number of measures for implementing and harmonizing it with the new trends and directions in European Higher Education have been adopted. They are related to:

- regulations, rules, methodologies, procedures for the Physical Education and Sports field;
- assuring quality staff and teaching-learning process;
- increasing the UNEFS visibility at the national and international levels;
- increasing the level of harmonization with the new directives of the European Union;
- implementing/ improving community programs (Erasmus and Erasmus +);
- providing specializations compatible with the new directions of knowledge and the labour market;
- raising the international prestige of both the UNEFS Congress and *Discobolul*, the Physical Education, Sports and Kinetotherapy Journal;
- increasing the student and teaching staff mobility;
- making approaches to recognizing and strengthening the Sports field;
- approving various activities for scientific research and the result dissemination in the European Area and in the World of Knowledge, to increase the UNEFS contribution to Sport science.

4. Discussions and conclusions

The fulfilled research reveals that UNEFS has implemented the Bologna process to a high degree and has acted as a leader in the Physical Education and Sports field, in this respect.

There are still some aspects concerning the new specializations required by potential employers and the employability level of national and international labour market that need to be tackled.

All members of the staff are motivated to successfully surpass any situation and improve the new educational system by designing new educational and administrative strategies and applying appropriate measures.

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