

Bologna process in fashion design education: An evaluation of applications used in Turkey

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Abstract

Higher education has been affected by a number of changes in the past decade, including higher rates of participation, internationalisation, the growing importance of knowledge-led economies and increased global competition. These changes have resulted in two main European policies: the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy, including the Modernisation Agenda for Universities. Both these broader international developments and the two specific European policy processes have been translated into policy change at national level affecting principally external quality assurance, autonomy, funding and research but also the shape and size of many higher education systems. These fundamental changes, along with the implementation of the core Bologna reforms, have altered deeply all activities of HEIs.

As the borders between European nations become less apparent, as monetary systems become uniform, as commerce and industry increasingly become multi-national, and as Europe is regarded as a single entity on the international stage it makes sense to develop a uniform educational system.

When Bologna Process is evaluated in terms of education in fashion design, it can be summarized as follows:

For students; it enables students to spend less time in educational institutions, have fewer courses compared to earlier practices, a more transparent process and a voice in education process. *For academicians*; it enables an increasing workload, caused by planning and evaluations although number of courses is reduced and a more transparent process. *For curriculum*; it offers fewer numbers of courses, a credit system that takes all learning cycle into consideration, a flexibility created with more optional courses, but a measurable standard method that is not flexible.

Keywords: Bologna process, fashion design, fashion design education

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1. Introduction

Such processes as globalization, post-modernization and liberalization have brought some very important transformations in terms of higher education and its functions. On one hand, the number of students in higher education is getting increased by including nearly half of young population and on the other hand, higher education institutions offer a wide range of education programs. The popularization of higher education results in an imbalance between supply and demand and problems of financing, accessibility and quality, privatization and commercialization tendencies.

The common point of all these changes is that they all have international boundaries. Therefore, higher education is seen as a primary political area in terms of both national authorities and international institutions. Although all these factors are open for international interaction in recent century, it has also required a need to discuss higher education systems organized on a national scale on a common platform by international institutions. On one hand, while such international institutions as The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) discuss about higher education in terms of both member countries and non-member countries; on the other hand, European Union sees this common policy development in higher education as a key to economic growth and competitiveness in global economy (Yilmaz, 2013).

The studies that aim to create a dynamic and effective information society and economy until 2010 and that started with Lisbon Process of European countries which have lost their ability to compete with the USA especially both in higher education and research, have increased with a radical speed in Europe. The practices of European countries on this scope to organize a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and European Research Area (ERA) are determined in Bologna Process and it is supported and improved by the subsequent processes (Kalayci, 2008).

Depending on the applications of countries in Bologna Process that are organized to create a comparable, competitive and transparent higher education area in member countries, the targets defined herein are improved within the framework of requirements. These requirements are as follows:

An easily understandable and comparably academic grading system

- A higher education system with three levels (undergraduate/graduate/postgraduate)
- A clear description of transition between these levels
- Creating a National Competence Framework in Higher Education

Quality Assurance

- Establishing a national quality assurance system that is adaptable with the standards of European principles
- Enabling students to participate all decision making processes in higher education
- Maintaining an international participation to national quality assurance practices

Recognition of Diplomas and Study Periods

- Starting the application of Diploma Supplement (DS) in member countries
- Putting European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) into practice in all member countries
- Making necessary arrangements for recognition of diplomas and ratings in countries contracted within Lisbon Recognition Agreement

Life Long Learning

- Making arrangements to recognize ratings used in formal education to rate such competences attained with experiences and through learning outside school

- Measuring and documentation of competences acquired through formal, informal and non-formal methods

Joint Ratings

- Organizing joint ratings and diploma programs among countries in higher education and recognizing them mutually

After the Leuven Declaration of Ministers Conference organized in 2009, attention is taken on primary targets and operation areas following the year 2010. In this view, besides the basic operation areas stated above, mobility, social dimension and lifelong learning are also added to primary operation areas that require a follow-up and improvement by higher education in the next 10 years (CHE, 2010).

Bologna Process has come to a more different and unforeseen point than its initial purpose (Froment, 2006). The reason is that European Union has 25 member countries, but Bologna Process has 47 countries. Besides such countries on candidate status as Turkey and the Balkan countries, there are also other countries like Sweden, Norway and Russia, the memberships of which will never be a matter of discussion. When such countries that have no connections with Europe and European Union as Georgia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are also included in this process, it is possible to say that Bologna Process is no longer a process only for European Universities and it has become a guideway for all universities that seek to be involved in these global academic cooperations (Calik, Suzen 2013).

Although Bologna Process and its objectives are expanded and widely accepted in so many countries, there are also some criticisms about the process. The most important of these criticisms is that the principles and standards developed to adapt higher education institutions will reduce the differences and diversity among universities and universities will be very much alike in terms of their structures, functions and administrations (Nohutcu, 2006). In another important criticism, it is indicated that Bologna Process is not completely accepted by all participants, in which some countries are concerned about this centralist process that will result in losing their self-government both in national and university scale (Birtwistle, 2009).

Turkey is involved in Bologna Process in 2001 and there have been many legislative regulations within Bologna Process since 2001. The applications of Bologna Process are organized by Council of Higher Education (CHE) in Turkey. CHE is involved with decisions related to the applications of Bologna Process in universities in Turkey on a national scale.

In this study, main practice areas of Bologna Process will be discussed, referring to the current and probable effects of Bologna Process on Turkish higher education system under general framework and on education of Fashion Design under specific framework. A literature review is conducted on Bologna Process and on such fields as arts and design education in this study. The findings are obtained by comparing the needs of arts and design education and the ones required by Bologna Process.

In many universities in Turkey, studies are conducted for curriculum development within Bologna Process. In this process;

- Developing clear, explicit and assessable outcomes for programs that base on field competences and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Turkey (NQF-HETR)
- Making relations between program outcomes and National Qualifications Framework ve Basic Field of Education
- Checking whether program outcomes provide a national competency and field competency
- Determining a curriculum that involves the program outcomes
- Determining clear, explicit and assessable learning outcomes, contents, teaching methods, evaluation methods and course credits for each course

- Making connections between program outcomes and learning outcomes of a course and checking whether it is achieved to provide program outcomes defined in the curriculum.
- Publishing all details of programs and courses in the Internet pages of higher education institutions.
- Studies are conducted to establish institutional quality assurance systems for these processes developed.

Departments of fashion design in Turkey also renew their course plans, learning outcomes, teaching and evaluation methods within Bologna Process. Before discussing the effects of applications of Bologna Process on academicians, students, teaching plans and sector in fashion design departments, it will be of sole benefit to shortly evaluate the scope of fashion design education and its characteristics within the framework of Arts and Design Education.

Design Process is actually a problem solving process. This process begins with developing solutions for analysis and results of problems, needs and characteristics of target population by using pre-planned research methods. The solutions developed are revised and changed until reaching the best one by making experiments or evaluations (Cakir & Karatas, 2012).

Design is a concept that is related to time. Designers work on a reality that is imagined in a future. Designers try to plan and define envisaged images (that is non-existing yet). The most important characteristic of designing action is the need to think about future and to define the future problems. A future of uncertainty can be foreseen not only by thinking, but by the help of intuitions and common sense. A designer must learn to use and strengthen its intuitions and common sense so that he/she will be able to learn how to make speculations about future.

Creative thinking ability of a fashion designer must have developed on a sufficient level. The duty of fashion designers is to interpret the future needs today and to direct them when needed. In other words, this attitude of observing people from outside and ability to look at them with different viewpoints other than certain patterns is one of the competencies that fashion designer students seek to acquire during their designing education process. It is very difficult to evaluate the business of fashion design as it carries abstract and concrete, assessable and non-assessable, predictable and unpredictable characteristics in its body.

Although designing has tangible results, the process that takes designers to this result is quite abstract. The main focus of design education is not the result, but how the process takes place. When it comes to design education, it is impossible to build an infrastructure for designing education basing on each designer's unique style, way of expression and designing process. Every one agrees on the fact that science, technology and art courses should be involved in design curriculum (Findeli, 2001). The matter of discussion here is at what level the course areas will be covered. One of the most critical points is how theoretical courses, workshops, seminars and studio classes will be taught in a single curriculum according to the general objectives of design education and applications.

Presently, education in fashion design has become a popular career option. Education in fashion design should be multi-lateral as it includes many areas and requires many competences to be used at the same time.

2. An evaluation of Applications Bologna Process in Fashion Design Education

According to the main operation areas of Bologna Process, if we evaluate education in fashion design on an undergraduate level in Turkey;

2.1. National Qualifications Framework and Basic Field of Education

National Qualifications Framework is a system in which competencies and their relations are explained on a national scale or in a single education system; recognized by national and international partners and constructed in a certain plan. Using this system, all competencies and other learning attainments in higher education can be explained and associated with each other in a consistent way (CHE2010). In this view, “National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Turkey (NQF-HETR)” is prepared and “Basic Field of Education” is defined in vocational education areas in higher education for two-year degrees, undergraduate, post graduate and doctoral degrees within higher education system. So, following the field competencies, higher education institutions started constructing education programs and updating them continuously (Gunes, 2012).

The art field with Code 21 involves 5 main areas as seen in Table 3 according to International Standard Classification in Education (ISCED). Two-digit codes are used with ISCED 97 (UNESCO) and three-digit codes are used with FOET99 (EUROSTAT-CEDEFOP). Undergraduate programs of Fashion Design in Turkey are associated with field no 21 of ISCED.

Competencies of undergraduate level in basic fields of art are seen in Table 2. When the table is examined, it is seen that competencies given as undergraduate level of basic fields of art with code 21 are the general competencies involving all fields of art. It does not provide enough data to prepare a curriculum for field of fashion design.

International Standard Classification of Occupations – According to ISCO 08, Code 2163 describes designers of product and clothes. Competencies of product and clothes designers with Code 2163 refer to the competencies required by Article 9.

National competencies and field competencies that undergraduate departments of Fashion Design should take into consideration provide the needs in Bologna Process that requires developing competency-based curriculum. However, there are no competencies for fashion designers recognized and accepted by Vocational Qualifications Institute. This leads to different curriculums in many fashion design departments on a national scale when developing curriculums. It gets more difficult even on a national scale to create mobility because of different curriculum in Bologna process in which the main objective is to increase mobility.

Higher education institutions are required to define the knowledge, skills and attitudes of graduates within Bologna Process. In Bologna Process applications, higher education institutions are free to define their program outcomes. However, this freedom is limited. Program outcomes are required to involve National Competencies Framework, Field Competencies and Vocational Competencies. After this, an association study is recommended for the competencies stated above, using the program outcomes described by each diploma program. The purpose of this association study is that no missing competence will be left for students by full adaptations to national, field and vocational standards.

This enables students to finish school with an undergraduate degree at maximum competence within European Higher Education Zone. However, the larger part of program outcomes prepared by Higher Education institutions involve outcomes of national competencies, field competencies and vocational competencies and when the present credit limit is taken into consideration, no freedom is given to higher education institutions to be unique.

The criticisms about Bologna Process involve concerns about creating a homogenous curriculum that is based on monotype national competencies, field competencies and vocational competencies. It is emphasized that this will lead to lose different characteristics of European Higher Education. It is also stated that Bologna Process will cause higher education institutions to their self-government. Such facts accepted as competitive power of Europe until recent years as decreasing the differences in European higher education system are accepted as one of the dangers caused by the process. As seen, people who approach Bologna Process with a critical viewpoint state that accepting diversity in higher

education systems as enrichment and adapting it with convergence are in contradiction to each other and they are curious about how these different systems will be reconciled.

As in all other areas, Bologna Process, therefore, faces with many reactions and negative criticisms especially in arts and design education. This problem is mentioned in the meetings held by Deans Council of Arts Faculties for Turkey. One of the most important criticisms is that the monotype structure of Bologna process contradicts with the creative nature of arts and it limits the production of new and original pieces. It is emphasized that, first of all, one should be self confident, think independently, go beyond the rules and patterns and express his/her ability to the best in a free environment (Aral, 1999).

When fashion design is evaluated in terms of its education, fast developing fashion tendencies create expectations to produce new designs continuously. This will result in approaching the design problems with the same or similar solutions, which are faced by fashion designers that graduate from different higher education institutions in accordance with the same national standards. It is also possible that this will lead to less diversity in fashion sector.

2.2. Curriculum Development and European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

After higher education institutions define their program outcomes, they design the courses and their credits according to their priority within the present education period in a way that they will meet all these outcomes.

In European Higher Education Area, another method adopted to adapt with different higher education systems and to increase the students' and academicians' mobility is European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) (Olmez, Kiyici, 2012). ECTS, a system in which higher education institutions agree on course recognitions and credit transfer, requires studying 60 credits from students in a single academic year. Workload of students is presumed to be between 1500-1800 class hours to be equal to 60 ECTS. By taking workload of students into consideration, they are assigned with 30 credits in total in one semester. Course credits in ECTS are based on competencies to acquire by students in one class hour and calculated according to workloads of students to acquire these competencies (CHE2010). Workload of a student refers to the time spent by students for all activities to acquire the attainments of a course.

The number of credits in the curriculum is re-determined during Bologna Process. When this issue is evaluated specifically for Turkey, our traditional credit system, presently used in some institutions and before the applications of Bologna Process, used to change in accordance with the time spent by students in classes and whether this is spent for practice or theory. In Turkish Higher Education system, one credit included 2 practice hours and one theory class included 1 credit. This gave an opportunity to have longer education periods in areas that required especially practice-based skills. One of the most important effects of Bologna process in credit calculation specifically in Turkey is that the difference between theory credits and practice credits is abolished. This led to a decrease in number of class hours that required skills and in many art departments like fashion design and also a reduction at the times spent by students at schools.

Development of information and communication technologies and globalization took education outside schools. Learning does not only take place in schools. However, after these changes made in credit system, the applications instructed by academicians in classes turned into the ones solely conducted by students and their durations shortened. Targeting to reach a quality assurance in education, Bologna Process will affect the present quality negatively in such fields that require especially practice-based skill development.

The condition of national credits not to exceed ECTS credits made it obligatory to reduce the credits of many courses. Besides, the association of ECTS credits with student workload brought its

measurability into the agenda; and ECTS credits in many higher education institutions are grounded on a mathematical calculation, not on the students' workload. Many higher education institutions in Turkey use ECTS and national credits simultaneously. And this leads to confusions.

Another problem for departments of fashion design is the crediting problem of internships. Before the applications of Bologna Process, the internships made in departments of fashion design used to be at times other than the academic calendar. These internships were an obligation to finish the program but they had no credits. In ECTS applications, an extra semester is required for internships in the academic calendar that would correspond to 30 ECTS. This brought a discussion between internship or class hours. In short, higher institutions of fashion design had to quit either all the courses of one semester or the internships.

2.3. Quality Assurance

In Bologna texts, quality assurance refers to an evaluation, accreditation and auditing system. Bologna reforms led to important changes also in the field of quality assurance. The determination of common standards in terms of foreign quality assurance, continuous development and voluntarily organized institutional quality processes are getting wider in all Europe. European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is published in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in 2005. These standards guide higher education institutions in terms of quality assurance and aim to serve to each other in a comparable way.

Accreditation means the certification of diploma and courses on common criteria. It is stated that accreditation is important in providing a standardization of work power, therefore making student mobility easier and enabling employers to find qualified work power, as they demand.

Internal evaluation and strategic planning, a part of quality assurance system, will contribute universities to determine their own problems and to seek ways to solve those problems. External evaluation, conducted by someone from an independent institution or outside the institution, will have an important role in determining the flaws that are hard to recognize when looked inside the university. Quality assurance system as a whole is seen as a system that will increase the recognition of universities in national and international academic world and reinforce the conscious of responsibility and accountability as it requires all operations to be transparent (OlmezKiyici, 2012).

There has been no systematic configuration in Turkey in terms of quality assurance. Quality assurance was the weakest area of Turkey in the carnet that evaluates higher education systems of countries during Bologna Process. This type of failing is felt in our higher education system and there is no quality assurance system that has long been applied and the effectiveness of which is accepted by the authorities. This is an important deficit.

When an evaluation is made in terms of education in fashion design, educational institutions that also take professional competencies into consideration are required to establish an appropriate quality assurance system. Systems transferred from other countries or institutions are not successful. Besides this, in terms of external evaluations, as in the example of National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), an accreditation organization currently operating in the United States, field based accreditation organizations should be established and encouraged for conducting evaluations.

2.4. Enabling students and partners to participate all decision-making processes in higher education

Student participation refers to involving students in higher education management as ‘equal partners’ during decision-making process. This enables to regard students as qualified, active and constructive partners to make changes in higher education, being an impulsive power (CHE 2010). It is greatly emphasized that student participation must be regarded as a participation in decision-making processes as they were completely mission in many administrative and decision-making processes. National Student Council is established in Turkey with a law in September 20th, 2005. However, it is not quite right to say that this application of Bologna Process gained a complete functionality on a national scale. As in many other areas of Bologna Process, cultural transformation is also needed in this issue.

It is especially emphasized in Bologna Process to determine the program outcomes and to cooperate with sectors and employers that recruit graduates in development and operation processes of quality assurance systems. The ones who are against this claim that universities will be managed like companies if employers become partners. Being a tool for economic development, higher education institutions are evaluated as the ones that associate education with business market and there is growing number of people who support the idea that higher education does not provide service for employer-based skills and competences (Olmez, Kiyici, 2012).

When it is evaluated in terms of education in fashion design, student participation into decision-making processes of education will make great contributions to education. The biggest concern here is whether students’ contribution will increase the quality in the issues that interest their education or decrease it. Ready-made clothing companies that will contribute to education in fashion design may speak out their expectations from education institutions during program development process, offer opportunities to make internships in their companies, build a quality assurance system with feedbacks about graduates and contribute to its practice. Applications other than Bologna Process are presently available in terms of partner participation.

2.5. Diploma Supplement (DS)

This is an additional certificate to the diploma given by higher education institutions to better understand the ratings developed by European Council, European Commission and UNESCO/CEPES. This diploma attachment gives students an opportunity to express their skills and competences they acquired during their education periods (CHE, 2010). It is seen that this diploma attachment is densely used in 2010 Trends Report and it plays an important role for graduates to show their acquired competencies in terms of increasing the competitiveness in international business market and mobility to be recognized by employers in other countries (Olmez Kiyici, 2012).

Starting from 2005, all higher education institutions in Turkey give this diploma attachment, in which some details are stated about the education a graduate student has received, in accordance with the legal regulation. The biggest problem of diploma attachments is experienced by graduates that started school before Bologna Process started its applications. They face with the problem of transforming the data in previous system into new system such as program outcomes, credits, etc. stated in the diploma attachment.

2.6. Life Long Learning

Age group of people who wish to have higher education is getting wider and a ‘new student’ profile occurs between 24 and 34 year-olds. Demands of students in this group include lifelong learning to

renew their skills as required by their professions. Therefore, such types of flexible education as certificate programs, short-term courses come to the agenda. In this view, 'Life Long Learning' paradigm, developed especially by European Union, has been initiated in education in 2000s. Here, universities have important functions to provide the people lifelong learning opportunities (Vural Yilmaz, 2013).

Continuous Education Centers are established at universities in Turkey to give trainings for groups other than students. These centers offer trainings that are exclusively needed by previous graduates, sectors, many institutions and society. However, these trainings do not receive the same amount of priority as in undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs of universities in Turkey. It is seen outside the main functions of university. These trainings, especially in arts and design departments, do not go beyond preparatory courses for students who wish to get education in art departments of universities.

2.7. Mobility

When the efforts of European Union to create a harmony in higher education are examined, it is seen that academic mobility has an important role. Erasmus program, directly related to higher education about mobility practices in Europe, is initiated as a scholar support program by European Commission to support cooperative programs and short academic visits. Erasmus program has an older history than Bologna Process. Nowadays, it contributes to realize the objectives of Bologna Process with its support to students' and academicians' mobility on higher education level. In Erasmus program, students also have the opportunity of mobility to make internships.

Academicians and students at all fashion design departments of undergraduate schools on European platform can benefit from Erasmus program. Especially its opportunities offered for internships are not only among fashion design schools, but also all private sector institutions in this field, creating a chance to share their knowledge and experience.

3. Results

Bologna Process has become one of the hot issues in Turkey since 2001. Besides many other programs available in higher education system, it is still discussed in programs that give education especially in arts and offer practical training. Effects of Bologna reforms on higher education institutions are ranged as stronger central leadership, stronger partner effect and stronger lateral communication (Olmez Kiyici, 2012). Turkey, first of all, tries to adapt itself to the process in a formal framework. A formal transformation is required initially to settle these reforms and to adopt them on a philosophical basis. It is no doubt that it will take years to change the present mentality in higher education.

As Heinze and Knill (2008) stated, it is much easier to make policy transfers between countries of similar cultural backgrounds and to adopt them much easily and see the effects as expected. Transformation policies in Turkish education system are prepared with a centralist attitude and dictated to the base. If the pragmatists accept and internalize these and policy makers do not take the problems of pragmatists on the process into consideration, it will be of no use (Calik, Suzen, 2013).

When Bologna Process is evaluated in terms of education in fashion design, it can be summarized as follows:

For students; it enables students to spend less time in educational institutions, have fewer courses compared to earlier practices, a more transparent process and a voice in education process.

For academicians; it enables an increasing workload, caused by planning and evaluations although number of courses is reduced and a more transparent process.

For curriculum; it offers fewer numbers of courses, a credit system that takes all learning cycle into consideration, a flexibility created with more optional courses, but a measurable standard method that is not flexible.

Bologna Process aims to create a measurable, competitive and transparent higher education area. The most important point that requires attention in Bologna Process is that higher education institutions complete their integration process without reducing their present quality levels.

As Bologna Process is a comprehensive reform package, the effects of which will be seen in the long term, it is very difficult to make a prediction whether the process will be successful or not. The success of this process depends on the contributions made by the partners and their cooperation, internalization of accepted reforms on a philosophical base, sufficient amount of time and financial support. Time will tell us whether the objectives of Bologna Process, which offers a great opportunity to reconstruct higher education systems, will reach its target and be applied in all countries consistently.

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