

Bologna process challenges from Soran University students' perspective

Mzhda Sedeeq Hamad Ameen¹, Azah Kamiran Ahmed²

^{1 2} Affiliation and address of affiliation

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Abstract

This article attempts to identify the challenges that voices raised towards the Bologna Process by students of Soran University-Kurdistan as it entices each institution to become more effective as a result of more systematic formal external evaluation, but also more informal pressure by more mobile students. The population of the study comprises Soran University students and the sample consists of (102) randomly chosen students at Soran University from the faculties of (Education, Arts, and Science). The data have been collected using a questionnaire consisting of (24) items, the study has identified several impediments that Soran University students face during the process, including the fact that students had not participated in any courses or conferences related to the Bologna Process. It is also revealed that when technology is not provided as it needs to be, students will certainly face problems during the process of Bologna. Presenting tutorial courses for students with all the instructions and skills that students need, promoting academic mobility and facilitating the recognition of prior learning, for a better Bologna process the points that are mentioned need to be focused on.

KEYWORDS: BOLOGNA PROCESS, HIGHER EDUCATION, CHALLENGES, BOLOGNA FOLLOW-UP GROUP

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MZHDA SEDEEQ HAMAD AMEEN- Assistant lecturer

mzhda.hamadamin@soran.edu.iq

General Science Department- Faculty of Education- Soran University

Dr. AZAH KAMIRAN AHMED- Lecturer

Azah.ahmed@soran.edu.iq

Physical Education Department/ Faculty of Education- Soran University

1. INTRODUCTION:

Since May of 1999, to bring about a greater degree of “convergence,” 46 European countries have been engaged in reconstructing their higher education systems i.e. operating procedures and a move toward common reference points to create a European Higher Education Area. This voluntary undertaking, since 1950 a logical extension of the idea of European integration that has been deepening—as well as cultivation of seedlings of change in higher education that were planted in the 1990s—affects 16 million students and 4000 institutions, an enterprise comparable to the size and scope of higher education in the United States (Adelman, 2009)

The Bologna process is characterized by its high ambitions and long-term perspective (Huisman et al., 2012). The stakeholders changing composition involved in the Bologna process reflects the growing recognition of the importance of dialogue and collaboration to achieve the process's goals (Keeling, 2006).

The Bologna Process is a decentralized intergovernmental process involving 46 European countries and the European Commission. A policy-network-like model is a characteristic of the process, which is different from the bureaucratic governance ideal where state actors have sole authority (Klemenčič & Galán Palomares, 2017).

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

The challenges ahead of the bologna process are many, and there is no doubt that unexpected challenges will continue to emerge. Increasing ownership by all stakeholders and strengthened political support are required by EHEA (European Higher Education Area) countries to find solutions for common challenges. Whatever the specific areas for action in the coming years (European Higher Education Area, 2020).

The implementation of the guidelines of the Bologna process has faced several challenges, even in Kurdistan universities. This study aims to investigate the Challenges that Soran University encountered during the implementation of the Bologna process.

1.2 Problem statement:

Universities play a major role worldwide in reaching the target of making a knowledge society. In the recognition that universities must strengthen the three poles of the knowledge triangle: education, research and innovation; an argument is made in favour of investing more in the modernization and quality of universities (C & COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, 2005).

However, improvement occurred in the higher education system of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), but it seems that the implementation of the Bologna process in the universities of KRG still requires more adaptations. The overall data revealed that more than

half of the aforementioned university staff reported the unfavourable condition of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) implementation. The reason could be inconsistency in the policy of higher education management, especially in the issues associated with the infrastructure setting of the universities and quality assurance (Mahmood, 2021).

Soran University has been implementing the Bologna process since 2019, despite the advantages of converting to the Bologna process, challenges and obstacles have been detected due to the rapid change in the system and the limited capability to fulfil the requirements of the Bologna process implementation.

1.3. The significance of the study:

The Bologna process has many principles, for example, focusing on the recognition that students can study anywhere, develop quality assurance, and improve general and good curricular standards construction of outcomes and competencies among European students (Huisman, 2019). According to (Mngo, 2019), the Bologna process investigates opportunities to develop educational and socio-economic partnerships, including the exchange of knowledge, technology; and resources.

The basic idea behind the Bologna process is enhancing quality, mobility, and cooperation, Soran university has been applying the Bologna process since 2019 it became a symbol of the student-centred model at Soran University, and since then students' critical voices towards this process have been raised because of the challenges they face, based on a series of observations comprehending the experience of students that they have formed their fully applied Bologna process, It is possible to say that this work is grounded on a different pathway as it works on the critical voices of students and seeks to demonstrate the level of functioning and challenges of the Bologna process at Soran university.

1.4. Aim of the study:

The main aim of this research is to identify the challenges that face students at Soran University- Kurdistan Region during the Bologna process implementation from their perspective.

1.5. Terms and Definitions:

- **Bologna process:** The Bologna Process is a higher education reform process that is currently adopted by 49 European countries. Its main purpose is to facilitate student and staff mobility to enhance the quality and recognition of the higher education system and make it more inclusive and accessible (University of Duhok, 2022).

- **Higher education:** Any of various types of education given in postsecondary institutions of learning and usually affording, at the end of a course of study, a named degree, diploma, or certificate of higher studies. Higher educational institutions include not only universities and colleges but also various professional schools that provide preparation in such fields as law, theology, medicine, business, music, and art (Britannica, 2023).

- **Challenges:** The situation of being faced with, something that needs great mental and physical effort to be done successfully and therefore tests a person's ability (Cambridge Dictionary).

- **Bologna follow-up group:** The BFUG, or the Bologna Follow-Up Group, is responsible for executing the European Higher Education Area's policies. Its primary task is to transform the ministers' desires, as articulated in the ministerial communiqué, into actionable policy recommendations for the next ministerial meeting. The BFUG Board and secretariat oversee the day-to-day functions of the group, which rely on a structured policy-making cycle to ensure policy sustainability and development (Klemenčič, 2022).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. STUDY APPROACH

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher depended on the descriptive and analytical methods in both theoretical and practical aspects. On the theoretical side, the researcher used the theoretical approach to look at references, sources and previous studies available in building the theoretical background on the challenge of the Bologna process, as for the practical aspect, the researcher depends on analyzing the information and data statistically according to the answers of the study questions.

2.2. STUDY TOOL:

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher prepared a questionnaire to identify the challenges of applying the Bologna process, directed to (102) students at Soran University in the faculties of (Education, Arts, and Science). The questionnaire was consisting of (24) items. The formation of these items depends on the clarity of meaning, the integrity of the language and the simplicity of the expression. Each paragraph of the tool was given a weight as a three scale. To estimate the degree of approval of the challenges, they are yes (3), neutral (2) and no (1).

2.3. Validity and reliability:

To verify the validity of the study tool, the following was done: The initial questionnaire consisted of (20) items and was shared with (6) educational experts with competence in the field at Soran University and Dohuk University (Appendix 1), to express their opinions on the tool in terms of:

- The extent to which the items belong to the scale.
- The extent of the clarity of the paragraphs and the integrity of their formation;
- Any adjustments they deem appropriate.

The Validity is used to ensure the compatibility and affiliation of the items of the questionnaire and to what extent they pertain to the research goals. After considering their suggestions and comments, some of the items were re-written and added (4) more items to become the final form questionnaire namely (24) questions mentioned in Appendix 2.

For the reliability of the questionnaire, the test and re-test method was used. Two versions of the same questionnaires were distributed with a time interval of 2 weeks to 15 participants, The responses were analyzed according to the Spearman Correlation Coefficient was follows the Statistical Package for Social Science version 24 (SPSSV24). The reliability scores of the two questionnaires were calculated and the value was found to be 0.810, which indicates high repeatability of this questionnaire. The score of each respondent is given in the table below:

TABLE (1) SCORES OF 15 RESPONDENTS IN THE TEST AND RE-TEST

First-time test	Second-time re-test
177.0	176.0
196.0	191.0
125.0	120.0
149.0	127.0
163.0	177.0
185.0	193.0
183.0	175.0
135.0	103.0
167.0	162.0

165.0	126.0
178.0	137.0
183.0	189.0
177.0	179.0
177.0	176.0
196.0	191.0

2.4. POPULATION AND SAMPLE OF STUDY

The population of the study comprises the students of Soran University during the academic year 2022-2023. The sample of the study consisted of (102) students randomly chosen from the faculties of Education (42) students, Arts (36) students and Science (24) students at Soran University for the academic year 2022-2023.

3. Results

TABLE (2) MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION FOR THE ITEMS OF CHALLENGES OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

N	Items	N	M	Level of challenges of the Bologna process	SD
1.	Have you ever participated in any conferences on implementing Bologna process?	102	3.45	Medium	1.149
2.	Do you believe that the Bologna process is applicable in Soran University?	102	3.46	Medium	1.144
3.	Do you believe that students' poor financial state can affect badly on their performance under the Bologna process?	102	4.32	High	.454
4.	Does the lack of smart devices (Phones, Laptop...etc) form a challenge for implementing the Bologna process among students?	102	4.77	High	.486
5.	Does students' linguistic struggle form a further challenge for implementing the Bologna process?	102	4.34	High	.790
6.	Can the lack of students' time management skills make the Bologna process harder?	102	4.47	High	.754
7.	Do students study under the Bologna process just to pass?	102	4.15	High	.837
8.	Does the Bologna process cause financial problems for students?	102	3.65	Medium	1.078

9.	Is it appropriate for students to use the Bologna system?	102	4.55	High	.79 1
10.	Do you think the Bologna process is suitable for Kurdistan universities?	102	3.54	Medium	1.1 32
11.	Are there suitable and available requirements and tools at Soran University for the Bologna process to be implemented scientifically?	102	4.30	High	.80 6
12.	Do you think students will become more active and benefit if the Bologna process is implemented?	102	4.03	High	.94 9
13.	Is the Bologna process in the interest of students?	102	4.54	High	.55 9
14.	Does the Bologna process put more pressure on students than on teachers?	102	4.46	High	.57 5
15.	Do you think that the Bologna Process leads to students' less learning?	102	4.19	High	.93 1
16.	Do you believe the Bologna process has been successful at Soran University?	102	4.09	High	.98 6
17.	Are there enough requirements for implementing the Bologna process at Soran University?	102	4.39	High	.73 3
18.	Do you think the students will benefit if the Bologna process is implemented as it should be?	102	4.75	High	. 685
19.	scientifically students benefit from the Bologna process	102	4.57	High	.79 0
20.	Teachers put too much pressure on students in the Bologna process	102	4.17	High	1.1 26
21.	Do the teachers help students while studying the Bologna system?	102	4.48	High	.78 0
22.	Are small classroom sizes and a large number of students obstacles to the implementing Bologna process?	102	4.70	High	.47 6
23.	Are grades and evaluations in the Bologna process in the interest of the students?	102	3.78	Medium	1.1 14
24.	Are there enough diverse activities while implementing the Bologna process?	102	4.38	High	.73 1

1-2.99 = low

3-3.99 = Medium

4-5 = high

M=Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, N=Number

3.1. DISCUSSION

According to the results, three questions had the highest rate of Yes responses, namely questions 4, 18 and 22.

One of the questions with the highest percentage of “yes” was question no. (4) “Does lack of smart devices (Phone, Laptop...etc) form a challenge for implementing the Bologna process?” One of the reasons for the lack of smart devices such as mobile phones and laptops to the financial situation of students who may not be able to afford such devices.

Another question that had the second highest percentage of “yes” in the survey was Question (18): “Do you think the students will benefit if the Bologna process is implemented as it should be?”

The reason why teachers put so much pressure on students is that in the Bologna system, a lot of work is required from the student and a small portion from the teacher, although in the Bologna process, the role of the teachers is facilitating and guiding the students, to reduce the pressure on students.

Question (22) had the third highest percentage of “yes”: “Are small classroom sizes and a large number of students, obstacles the implementing Bologna process?” The reason for the small size of the rooms is due to the small size of the building of Soran University, especially the Faculty of Education, the rapid increase of the number of students as a result of accepting a large number of students from newly accepted first stages, and opening new departments each year in the same buildings puts pressure on the classes.

Also, based on the information provided, it appears that a majority of respondents to a survey about the Bologna Process in Soran University answered “no” to question number (1) “Have you ever participated in any conferences on implementing the Bologna process?” One possible reason for this negative response is a lack of awareness or understanding about the Bologna Process and its implementation. Students may not be aware of the courses available to them or may not fully understand the purpose and benefits of the Bologna Process.

Another reason could be a lack of resources or support for students to participate in these courses. If the courses are not well-promoted or are not easily accessible to students, they may not be able to take advantage of them. It is also possible that some students may not see the value in taking courses specifically focused on the Bologna Process. They may prioritize other academic or extracurricular activities over these courses or may not understand how the Bologna Process relates to their future academic or professional goals.

The results of respondents answered “No” to question (2), which read “Do you believe that the Bologna process is applicable in Soran University?”, This explains that there may be some doubts or reservations among the respondents about the suitability of the Bologna Process specifically for Soran University. A possible reason for this is that respondents may have concerns about the capacity of Soran University to implement the Bologna Process effectively. They may worry that the university may not have the resources, infrastructure, or administrative support needed to make the necessary changes required by the Bologna Process. As for the respondents’ answers to the question number (10), which read “Do you think the Bologna process is suitable for Kurdistan universities?” This means that there may be some scepticism or concerns among the respondents about the feasibility or practicality of implementing the Bologna Process across all Kurdistan universities; one possible reason for this negative response is that Kurdistan region may have unique cultural, social, and economic factors that could make the implementation of the Bologna Process more challenging.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, students at Soran University students shown that there are so many opportunities to apply the Bologna process but it is not yet enough to succeed in the process of Bologna, more preparation and effort are required to implement the Bologna process. The major challenges here are that rather than students becoming the centre of the process they just try to pass and overcome the obstacles, providing students with their requirements for the process, and presenting tutorial courses for students with all the instructions and skills that students need can reduce some of the obstacles as a first step to overcome the impediments.

The results found that Soran University students seem to be passionate about learning in the Bologna process if they are provided with their requirements and introduced to principles and tutorials on how they can perform better during the Bologna process.

Moreover, despite the lack of necessary equipment, most of the students believed that the overcrowded classrooms and the size of classrooms were both the main challenges in implementing the Bologna process.

5. RECOMMENDATION

1. Promote student exchange programs and encourage students to participate in exchange programs to possess valuable international experience, broaden their perspectives, and foster cultural understanding.
- 2.
3. Implementing a credit transfer system allows students to transfer credits earned at one institution to another, thus promoting academic mobility and facilitating the recognition of prior learning.

APPENDIX 1

TABLE 3 EXPERTS FOR THE VALIDITY PROCESS

Name	University	Specialty
Assis. Prof. Dr Bassam Fauzy	Soran University	Methods of teaching
Assis. Prof. Dr. Naqy hamza jasm	Soran University	Educational psychology
Dr. Charawan Jameel Hameed	University of Duhok	Methods of teaching
Assis. Lecturer Alan Pshtiwan Kareem	Soran University	Methods of teaching
Assis. Lecturer Mahmood Hawar Mahmood	Soran University	Methods of Teaching Science
Assis. Lecturer Hemn Ahmed	Soran University	Methods of Teaching Science

APPENDIX 2

TABLE 4 FINAL FORM OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

N.	Items	Yes	Neutral	No
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1.	Have you ever participated in any conferences on implementing Bologna process?			
2.	Do you believe that the Bologna process is applicable in Soran University?			
3.	Do you believe that students' poor financial state can affect badly on their performance under the Bologna process?			
4.	Does the lack of smart devices (Phones, Laptop...etc) form a challenge for implementing the Bologna process among students?			
5.	Does students' linguistic struggle form a further challenge for implementing the Bologna process?			
6.	Can the lack of students' time management skills make the Bologna process harder?			
7.	Do students study under the Bologna process just to pass?			
8.	Does the Bologna process cause financial problems for students?			
9.	Is it appropriate for students to use the Bologna system?			
10.	Do you think the Bologna process is suitable for Kurdistan universities?			
11.	Are there suitable and available requirements and tools at Soran University for the Bologna process to be implemented scientifically?			
12.	Do you think students will become more active and benefit if the Bologna process is implemented?			
13.	Is the Bologna process in the interest of students?			
14.	Does the Bologna process put more pressure on students than on teachers?			
15.	Do you think that the Bologna Process leads to students' less learning?			
16.	Do you believe the Bologna process has been successful at Soran University?			
17.	Are there enough requirements for implementing the Bologna process at Soran University?			

18.	Do you think the students will benefit if the Bologna process is implemented as it should be?			
19.	scientifically students benefit from the Bologna process			
20.	Teachers put too much pressure on students in the Bologna process			
21.	Do the teachers help students while studying the Bologna system?			
22.	Are small classroom sizes and a large number of students obstacles to the implementing Bologna process?			
23.	Are grades and evaluations in the Bologna process in the interest of the students?			
24.	Are there enough diverse activities while implementing the Bologna process?			

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ملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة الى التعرف على التحديات التي تواجه الطلبة في بولونيا في جامعة سوران-كردستان، حيث أنها تشجع كل مؤسسة على أن تصبح أكثر فعالية نتيجة للتقييم الخارجي الرسمي الأكثر منهجية، ولكن أيضاً نتيجة للضغط غير الرسمي من قبل الطلاب الأكثر تنقلاً. يتكون مجتمع الدراسة من طلاب جامعة سوران وتكونت العينة من (١٠٢) طالباً من طلاب جامعة سوران تم اختيارهم عشوائياً من فاكلتي (التربية، الآداب، و العلوم). تم جمع البيانات عن طريق استبانة مكونة من (٢٤) فقرة، وقد حددت الدراسة عدة معوقات يواجهها طلاب جامعة سوران أثناء العملية، منها عدم مشاركة الطلاب في أي دورات أو مؤتمرات ذات علاقة بعملية بولونيا. تم الكشف أيضاً أنه عندما لا يتم توفير التكنولوجيا كما يجب، سيواجه الطلاب بالتأكيد مشاكل أثناء عملية بولونيا. تقديم دورات تعليمية للطلاب تحتوي على جميع التعليمات والمهارات التي يحتاجها الطلاب إلى طلاب آخرين، وتعزيز الحراك الأكاديمي وتسهيل الاعتراف بالتعلم السابق، من أجل عملية بولونيا أفضل، يجب التركيز على النقاط المذكورة.

پوخته

ئهم توێژینهوهیه ئهو ئالنگاریانه شیدهکاتهوه که سهراوههیان گرتووه له دهنگی نارهزایی ماموستایان و قوتابیانی سهبارته به بۆلۆنیا پرۆسیس له زانکۆی سوران/ کوردستان. داتاکانی ئهم توێژینهوه له ڕیگای فۆرمی راپرسی (استبیا) کۆکراوهتهوه که له (٢٤) پرسیار پیک هاتبوو له لایهن توێژهراوه نامادهکرا، نموونهی توێژینهوهکه له (١٠٢) قوتابی زانکۆی سوران پیک هاتبوو که به شیوازی ههرمهکی ههلیژێردان. ئههجامهکان ئامارهیان به کۆمهلیک ئالنگاری دا که له زانکۆی سوران ههیه له بۆلۆنیا پرۆسیس وەک؛ قوتابیانی بهرلهوهی دهست به پرۆسهکه بکهن بهشدارنهبوونه له ههچ خولیک بهمههستهی ناشنا بوونیان و کۆکردنهوهی زانیاری سهبارته به پرۆسهکه، له ئیستادا تهکنهلۆجیا رۆلیکی گهوره دهگیریت له پرۆسهی فیرکردن و بهههمان شیوه بۆ بۆلۆنیا پرۆسیسیش، بۆیه لهکاتی بهردهست نهبوونی تهکنهلۆجیای پنیویست بنگومان قوتابیانی توشی گرفت دهبنهوه له جیهههتیکردنی ئهرکهکانیان لهم پرۆسهیهدا، و ههروهها پنیویسته قوتابیانی زیاتر هانیدرین بۆ چالاکیهکان و دهبیته کار لهسهه دهرفهتهکان بکریته و ئالنگاریهکانهم بکرینهوه به ئامانجی سهراکهوتهی پرۆسهکه.