



Towards a Strategy for Higher Education in Africa: The European Bologna Process as a Model

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Abstract

African countries are constraint to promote reforms in their higher education systems, in order to be in harmony with the globalisation of Higher Education. Most African countries adopted The European Bologna Process as a model Higher Education reforms.

African countries are constrained to adopt BP as they need material and financial support for their students, staff and universities. Several researchers concluded that BP was a phenomenon of neo-colonialism for developing countries mainly in Africa.

The application of BP in Africa failed to satisfy African needs of in Higher Education. A new model and a new strategy for organizing Higher Education are badly needed in Africa. The BP may be used as a model reforms, organization and planning HE in Africa.

This paper discusses the impacts of the bologna Process on African countries, and the need for an African model of HE to help in consolidating their unity and concretisation of their aspirations.

Keywords

The Bologna Process. Higher Education in Africa. New strategy for Higher Education. HE Reform in Africa.

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Introduction

The Higher Education is the cornerstone of any development policy. You cannot get any development or positive change in higher education without investing in it.

The importance of Higher Education is not confined to training students on the techniques, skills and science, but goes beyond it to economic, cultural, political and cultural aspects, and that highlights the importance of Higher Education.

Developed industrial countries gave Higher Education special attention, and worked on its development and invest in it. Thus, the European Union countries developed Bologna Process, as a tool for unifying Europeans through an elaborated strategy for Higher education.

What's more, it has worked to expand the list of countries belonging to the process from outside the EU. But exerted pressures poor and vulnerable countries from the Third World, and imposed its hegemony on them.

Whereas developing countries, especially the African countries did not give Higher Education its importance, making it resorted to ready systems of HE, to apply them in their own countries. That led to negatives repercussions on economic, civilization and political aspects, in the African Union and obstruct their aspirations.

Africa has got its political independence and its economy is progressing in recent years. It has made considerable effort in consolidation unity between African countries through its move from the Organization of African Unity "OAU" to African Union (AU), following the steps of Europe (EU).

It left them now to consolidate this trend by creating a strategy to coordinate cooperation in Higher Education, as a strategy similar to the European Bologna Process, based on African realities. That will help the AU to achieve its objectives in cooperation and integration for the benefit of Africa as a political force and an emerging nation.

The aims of this study are the identification of the circumstances that led to the emergence of the Bologna Process and its role in the unification of the European countries. It also addresses the tools and methods that used for the expansion of its applications outside Europe, and its impacts on the reality of higher education in neighboring countries. We also point out the need for African strategy for higher education to meet the economic, political bloc that needs a scientific strategy to back it.

It addresses also the required strategy for Higher Education, which should interact with the African realities and aspirations, which can be compared to the American Higher education system and the European Bologna Process, in the context of building a new system helping the concretization of Africa's goals of an emerging political, economic and cultural bloc and a rising power that needs to be heard in the next decades.

The collection of data for this paper is based on published literature on Higher Education from several African countries and the results from the application of the Bologna Process. It highlights also the need for a new strategy for Higher Education development in Africa. It relied also on the researches' own experience, as a student in three British universities, and as a lecturer in an Algerian university, who experienced the HE reforms and suffered frustration from the application of LMD in Algerian universities. Discussions are led also with students and colleagues from different Algerian and African lectures about the application of BP in their universities. All these conclusions are outlined in this paper.

The objectives and application of Bologna Process

The European reform of higher education (HE), was initiated in 1998 by the four signatories of the Sorbonne Declaration (France, Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom). One year later started the Bologna Process, when ministers of education from 29 European countries met in Bologna, - the Europe's oldest university-, in June 1999, to study the ways of harmonizing degree structures and quality assurance procedures of their higher



education systems. The meeting ended with signing a declaration which became known as Bologna Process (BP). The BP includes currently 46 member countries from the European Union.

The European Commission, as well as the Member States worked on reforms of higher education systems in Europe, to face the challenges of globalization. Reforms became badly needed to help meet the exigencies of modern knowledge society.

Amongst the objectives of BP, its international political and strategic aspects, as it:

- ensure mobility within the European HE space, in order to study or work in this space.
- increase the international competitiveness of the European HE by attracting the best students and scientists from outside Europe,
- give Europe the scientific capacity to face the challenges of the contemporary world.

1. Harmonization of European Higher Education system:

European Union is working hard to promote integration between its members. The most important means to reach this goal is the organization of a common system of Higher Education. The Bologna Process helped to reach the need for an educational system to facilitate mobility of students and lecturers between the member countries.

The aim of the European Higher Education Area is to provide citizens with choices from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses, with the benefit of smoother recognition procedures too. Three priorities were defined to reach these ambitious goals: the establishment of a comparable degree system, a European dimension to quality assurance, and the recognition of degrees and study periods abroad.

Ministers of HE from the EU have evaluated the results of applying BP, and issued the Leuven Communiqué that identified the following priorities for the coming decade:

- social dimension: equitable access and completion,
- lifelong learning;
- employability;
- student-centred learning and the teaching mission of higher education;
- education, research and innovation;
- international openness;
- mobility;
- data collection;
- multidimensional transparency tools;
- funding”.

2. Expansion of the HE strategy to neighbouring countries:



The Bologna Process does not stop at the limits of EU, but has an impact on other non-member countries, including most African countries. Bologna process has an impact on higher education in most African and Asian countries that present for them opportunities and challenges. These impacts are not always scientific, but are political, economic and civilisation, factors needing to be high-lighted.

The objectives of the BP in EU and partner countries are to:

- 1- encourage mobility of students and staff between local universities.
2. encourage mobility of students and staff between local and European universities.
- 3- develop, modernise and disseminate, new curricula, teaching methods, provide materials;
- 4- boost a quality assurance culture;
- 5- modernise of management and governance of higher education institutions;
- 6- strengthen the role of higher education institutions in society and enhance their contribution to the development of lifelong learning;
- 7- reinforce the "knowledge triangle" of education, research and innovation in universities
- 8- encourage links with the labour market, including the promotion of entrepreneurship and the creation of business start-ups;

From these objectives, we find most of them are goals of any educational system, such as the impacts of HE on the society in general, as mentioned in points. Therefore, there is no new in the BP reforms.

Structures of the BP and means of intervention

The Bologna Process has three strategies and tools used as means to realise its objectives: Tempus, Agfa and Erasmus Mundus.

1. TEMPUS

The role of Tempus in modernising higher education:

Tempus is the EU program that supports the modernisation of higher education in the partner countries. It contributes to creating an area of cooperation in the field of higher education between the European Union and its surrounding partner countries. Tempus promotes the voluntary convergence with EU developments in higher education deriving from the Lisbon Strategy to create more jobs and growth, and the Bologna Process to establish a European Area of Higher Education.

Tempus also finances certain 'accompanying measures'. Unlike Joint Projects and Structural Measures. They comprise dissemination and information activities such as thematic conferences, studies and activities aiming at the identification and exploitation of good practice, consultation of stakeholders, etc.

Tempus program promoted exchange with non-EU countries in the Western Balkans, East Europe, Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. Although many of the nation's participating in the Tempus Program are not signatory to the Bologna Process, much of the work they are doing through the program is aimed at incorporating Bologna principles as part of an overall higher education reform.

In Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia for example, the Tempus exchanges are focused on developing curricula for new "bachelor (Licence)/master/doctoral" programs in a range of subject areas. In the five Central Asian states



there appears to be a greater focus on developing quality assurance and accreditation procedures in higher education.

Bearing in mind that among the objectives of the BP, the promotion of international mobility cooperation between the EU and its environment outside Europe, the “partner countries”.

Tempus finances two types of action:

a. Joint projects:

Joint Projects are based on multilateral partnerships between higher education institutions in the EU and the partner countries.

Joint Projects are designed to:

- develop, modernise and disseminate new curricula, teaching methods or materials;
- boost a quality assurance culture;
- modernise the management and governance of higher education institutions;
- strengthen the role of higher education institutions in society and enhance their contribution to the development of lifelong learning;
- reinforce the “knowledge triangle” of education, research and innovation in universities
- encourage links with the labour market, including the promotion of entrepreneurship and the creation of business start-ups;
- facilitate the enlargement of existing “Erasmus Thematic Networks” and the extension of their activities in partner countries.

Joint Projects include small scale and short duration mobility activities for students, academic staff, researchers, university administrators and enterprise.

b. Structural measures:

Structural Measures contribute to the development and reform of higher education institutions and systems in partner countries, to enhance their quality and relevance, and increase their convergence with EU developments.

They can address issues linked to the reform of governance (qualification systems, quality assurance, autonomy...), or the links between higher education and society (world of work, other sectors of education...).

This includes studies and research, organisation of national, regional and thematic conferences and seminars, provision of training, policy advice and dissemination of information.

2. Alfa

“Similar avenues of cooperation with 18 Latin American countries are encouraged through the “Alfa Program”. Cooperation through this program is focused on building networks between universities in member countries, increasing academic mobility between the two regions, and promoting the “attractiveness” and “excellence” of the European Higher Education Area” (Clark: 2007).

3. Erasmus Mundus



Erasmus Mundus aims to enhance quality in higher education through scholarships and academic cooperation between Europe and the rest of the world.

Funding is available for:

- European joint **Masters** and **Doctorates** (including scholarships);
- **Partnerships** with non-European higher education institutions and scholarships for students and academics;

Projects to promote European higher education worldwide

From a strategy of integration to a means for dominance

The Bologna process is used as a basic support, aiming to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

These actions let the European system of HE, “more compatible and comparable, more competitive and competitive and more attractive for Europeans and for students and scholars from other continents”.

The BP aims at the creation of greater intra-European academic mobility and the attractiveness of non-Europeans, as a study destination, mainly for students and researchers from Africa, central Asia and Western Balkan.

As far as national mobility there is no change, but for the international mobility we will witness an acceleration of emigration to Europe and brain drain of the Algerian best students and scholars.

France has been most active in promoting Bologna-style reforms in its former colonies and the French-speaking countries of the Maghreb – Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia – are reforming their systems in line with France to create a three-year licence (degree), two-year masters and three-year doctorate structure, that is “**Licence-Master-Doctorat**” (LMD). Morocco introduced the new degree system in 2003- 2004, and Algeria in 2004-2005, at pilot faculties, they followed shortly by Tunisia in 2006-2007 (Ghouati: 2009). The three countries were supported by French government, the European Union and the World Bank.

The African HE system became more tied to the European Bologna Process, which is a sign of a neo-colonialism and globalisation of higher education in the world.

The African Lecturers and students became more alienated as they are not consulted for any change, and the African HE became under control and surveillance of European commission of HE.

“The Bologna Process is not only one of the biggest news stories in higher education in Europe, but its magic seems to be spreading with tsunamic affect. Bologna is fast becoming a truly global phenomenon. Nations as far afield as Cameroon, China, Australia, Russia and Brazil, are either talking about, or signing on to, a Bologna style ‘restructuring brand’ (Robertson: 2008).

The spirit of LMD reforms was the international cooperation, and cross-Mediterranean consultations were carried out. The objective was to integrate all Mediterranean countries, in what is called ‘Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area (EMHER).’, and the relevant document was signed in January 2006 and is known as the **Catania Declaration**.

The BP spread from the EU to the Mediterranean area, and almost 140 universities from 30 countries are signatory to the founding **Tarragona Declaration** (Clark: 2007).

Reality and constraints Higher Education in Africa



African countries are meeting a variety of complex and interlocking problems, in the economic, social, cultural and political aspects. These problems are caused by a combination of factors, accumulated over years for historical reasons as a result of European occupation foreign interference in their internal affairs.

The main factor for the complex problems and failures in Africa in general, is the European occupation. And so was the French, the British, the Spanish and Portuguese occupations. African countries have got their independence by the middle and the end of the twentieth century, but the repercussions of the occupation still linger till now day. Although military occupation ended, the Western dominance politically and economically still remains till now including Higher Education.

The higher education system in Africa is also dominated by the European hegemony; it appeared what can be called the Higher Education colonization. African countries have inherited education system from the former colonialists, using its languages, curricula and objectives. Despite the presence of African languages, African countries adopted the languages of the occupiers, which are still dominants in higher education. We find in Algeria, for example, that the Arabic language is the national and official language, but the French is the dominant in higher education and in all administrations. Several African countries, but it came adopted the language of the colonizer as a national language.

This trend was reinforced after the emergence of the Bologna process. The aim of the Bologna path was primarily to strengthen convergence and unity and to facilitate the mobility of students and teachers between the various countries of the Bologna Process area. However, the Bologna process exceeded this goal to become a tool for domination of the Union on the higher education sector in many third world countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Balkans countries.

Thus, former colonial countries, led by France, applied political and economic pressures, on African countries, pushing them to adopt Bologna process. This task was eased by the weakness, backwardness and economic crises in most African countries. The European Union used carrot and stake, by showing the benefits of applying Bologna Process, through the facilitating students and teachers' mobility to European countries, and joining European universities.

The African states are suffering from social pressures, economic crises, foreign interferences and that does not allow them to have an independent higher education system. Moreover, there is absence of a clear strategy for the cooperation between African countries in the field of higher education. The only issue left for the Africans is the acceptance and application of the Bologna Process system. So, they found themselves obliged to apply BP, without consultation with the social partners, teachers, students, workers, local experts, and without having it adapted or modified. That led to a series of obstacles and difficulties in its application, thus its failure.

Yet, the African countries were hit by economic crisis, and could not finance the needs of the crowded universities, and the over used facilities. The bad leaving and professional conditions of students lectures and staff of the universities, led to dramatic waves of immigration of the best of their scientists to Europe and North America. Scholars from North Africa, mainly from Algeria, immigrated to the Middle East too.

The conditions were deteriorating, and there was a decrease in the teaching quality. The political problems and the unemployment let the problems worst, and the objective of most students and lecturers is to take any opportunity for emigration. Kefalonia pointed out that "local debates that have sometimes accompanied it, focused more on the terms of its implementation than on the problems of the African HE" (Khelfaoui: 2009 p. 26).

Practice and constraints of applying BP in Africa



African states adapted her policy to all these changes, and started a new reform within the framework of Bologna Process. There was constraint to promote changes in its higher educational system, in order to be in harmony with the requirements of globalisation.

African countries new a tremendous change in the number of universities, and was increased several times, and the number of students has increased in even higher proportions.

The Declaration covers the same principles as BP, such as comparability and readability of higher education systems; transferable credits; easily readable qualifications relevant to academia and the labour market; and shared quality assurance goals to promote the mobility of students and faculty.

In the eighteenth century, European nations imposed their systems of education on foreign shores through imperial conquest, followed by the US model which was adopted in parts of Asia. It may be argued that a new 'Euro model' is emerging as an influence on education systems around the world via the BP, a more collaborative means of cross-border cooperation.

In African meetings, discussions generally focus on cooperation with the European Bologna Process, more than discussing ways of coordinating their efforts to confront their local problems and educational obstacles, relying on their own capacities and experiences.

The failure of BP in realizing hopes of Africans

In African meetings, discussions generally focus on cooperation with the European Bologna Process, more than discussing ways of coordinating their efforts to confront their local problems and educational obstacles, relying on their own capacities and experiences.

The reform of the higher educational system in Africa was not a result of local research and concertation between concerned politicians, scholars and researchers, but imported from a foreign environment. The LMD reforms are implemented without explanation and without having the staff aware of the expected changes.

Most lecturers think that the shift for this new system may not be necessary at this moment. African universities need reforms, to solve the problems facing them, and tackle the real problems from which the higher education in Africa suffers.

The BP program is not a material good that can be marketed anywhere in the world, but is a social cultural and educational product that deal with values and attitudes, which are difficult to transfer from one cultural environment to another different one.

The need for a new strategy of Higher Education reforms in Africa

The dependence on imported goods, technology and consumption of foreign ideas and organizational systems are considered signs of failure. The progress cannot be reached through the consumption of what the others produce, but that can be achieved through hard work, production, innovation and creativity, of goods, services, technology and even literature and the arts.

African states have adopted a strategy of importation, to meet its needs of goods and services, including educational systems, ready to be used as it is. However, the facts proved that organizational sets and methods cannot be applied locally, which requires finding local alternatives in line with the political ambitions, as well as the local economic, social and cultural realities. That applies also to the regulation of Higher Education network in Africa.



African leaders made tremendous efforts for political rapprochement and economic integration between African states, that is incomplete without a regulatory framework for cooperation and integration at the level of higher education. Bologna Process may be a model to be followed for building a new African strategy for cooperation, integration and exchange of experiences between African universities.

This can be achieved through the pursuit of a set of common goals, which can be summarised as follows:

1. Create mechanisms to facilitate mobility of African students between African universities.
2. Facilitating the mobility of lecturers between African universities.
3. Structures and mechanisms to develop programs and curricula for African universities, according to modern scientific standards.
4. The improvement of the management of Higher Education institutions in Africa.
5. Structures for training on modern teaching technology
6. Providing financial support and grants for students facilitating their mobility between African universities.
7. Providing financial and material help for universities from poor African countries.
8. Setting up objectives and strategies for teaching languages prevailing in Africa to facilitate the mobility of students, professors and experts.
9. Setting up targets for higher education in Africa, and future plans and providing the necessary conditions for its success.
10. Setting up permanent organizational structures, with the necessary funding for the success of their objectives.

These aspects outline of a path of African Higher Education, contributing to enhance the independence of Africa and highlight the unity and integrity, so that it can keep pace with changes and meet the challenges and positive interaction with the requirements of globalization.

Discussions

Decisions are badly and urgently needed, to break the deterioration of performance of African universities.

While adopting the BP, concerned staff and students were not included in the discussion of the reforms, therefore they were against it. The orders came from the top to base for application, and the reform ignored any reference to the local context and realities" (Khelfaoui: 2009 p. 25). The same as most African countries, the BP was introduced in Africa without significant consultation of local scientific and educational agents.

The people concerned with the application of the LMD are not motivated, and the application of the reforms will have to face more problems and obstacles.

One advantage of the BP is the mobility of students and staff, and this seems to be good and beneficial, to both parts. But the fact is that it is beneficial to Europeans only. There is no real mobility as no Europeans accept to teach for long terms in African universities. On the other hand, African lecturers are seldom accepted to teach in European universities. So, what is called mobility for Europeans is Brain Drain for countries of the south.



Thousands of the best scholars are each year motivated to emigrate to Europe and the United State of America, hence African universities are training for the developed world. More than 50 % of students trained in Europe make situations there and never return home.

The practice of staff and student's mobility is an encouragement of selective emigration of highly qualified searchers and scholars, and an invaluable loss for African economy.

A research in the Maghreb and West Africa have shown that the exodus of scientists is increasing more dramatically in contexts of exclusion, marginalisation and non-involvement in the future direction of institutions and of countries in general, than under difficult living and material conditions. In the 1980s and 1990s, countries like Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire were very opulent but experienced a remarkable drain.

The BP is a tool for reform and modernisation of HE, but is not appropriate to the African local realities, hence needs to be adapted and applied in collaboration with the university staff, students and experts from concerned countries.

Another aspect of the BP is the interference in cultural conflicts within Algeria. France, as a former colonialist of Africa, kept her cultural and lingual influence, and the French language in Africa and the French speakers are always supported by France. The BP is used to influence the lingual landscape in Africa.

When we talk about HE, and universities, we find two aspects, teaching and research. While the BP concentrate on teaching, and do not pays any attention to research and production of knowledge in African universities. The BP system maintains the Africans as followers and receivers, and not as searchers and creative designers.

Attached as they are to their academic identities, European countries have reduced the ambitions of the "BP" to the mere establishment of conditions conducive to the mobility of students and academics.

In application of BP, and cooperation between EU and Algeria, several tempus programs were introduced in cooperation with some Algerian universities. The setup of joint Tempus programs helped to modernise these programs and to improve its scientific level, as well as the competence of trained students. But the number of Tempus programs set up with African universities, and the numbers of trained students, are almost insignificant, and the result will be late to be seen.

Conclusions

The Bologna Process is newly applied in Africa, and no evaluation is done yet on its impacts, but it is creating a dynamic of reforms that can be beneficial for African HE.

The BP is designed to satisfy the needs and objectives of the European Union. Developing countries, such as Africa, should not take the process as it is, but should take benefit of it and adapt its objectives and practices to her local cultural economic and political characteristics.

The actual reforms should be expended and deepened, to solve the real constraints of HE in African, and pay more attention to the human, occupational and organisational aspects of the African universities.

More efforts are needed, and financial means are required, to face the complex challenges of globalisation, and to have effective universities, to match the performances of rising economies as Africa aspire to be.

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