

The Bologna in the Field of Social Sciences and Humanities: A Precondition for Successful University Education¹

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The Bologna Process represents the most significant extensive reform of higher education in Europe. The particular aspects of the Bologna Process still incite critical evaluations as regards the successfulness of its implementation. The theoretical part of the paper analyzes the fundamental principles defined in the Bologna Declaration, requirements and critical views of the Bologna Process, as well as the relevant research conducted on this issue used for the comparative analysis. The introduction of the Bologna Process into the Serbian university education has initiated numerous changes, the increase of the student mobility being the most striking one. The empirical part of the paper focuses on the study of the following problem: the manner in which students of social sciences and humanities perceive the Bologna Process fifteen years after its implementation into the Serbian university education. Consequently, the subject matter of the research is the observation and description of students' attitudes to this phenomenon with the purpose of acquiring relevant information "firsthand". The achievable objective of the presented research reviews the context and condition of the Bologna Process during 2019/2020 academic year and its feasible improvements, which can contribute to comparative study of similar researches in the time of the pandemics. The specific research tasks include the study of the Bologna requirements, attitudes to the Bologna Process, benefits and restrictions of this reform, and particularly the attempt to suggest the improvement of the Bologna Process realization from the perspective of students of social sciences and humanities. The research sample consisted of the Bachelor students of social sciences and humanities from the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš (N=150). The survey technique and the scaling technique with a rating scale questionnaire were used (BOL-JM-JOZ). The questionnaire had five closed-ended questions, while the Likert scale was comprised of 23 items. The test of the instrument consistency proved its reliability. The obtained results were shown by the chi square test, which proved a statistically significant difference in the respondents' answers as regards the year of study, $p < 0.05$. The main factors were extracted from the assessment scale by the application of the factor analysis. These factors examined the students' perceptions of the Bologna Process, comparing the answers provided by the students of the first, second, third and fourth year of study of social sciences and humanities, $p < 0.05$.

Keywords: Bologna, present state of affairs, perspectives, perceptions, students

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Introduction

Serbian higher education has undergone various and substantial changes. The latest changes have been induced by the Bologna declaration which, along with other documents pertaining to the higher education reforms in Europe, constitute the Bologna Process. The first associations are series of changes, related to both educational materials and organisation, occurring in the educational system of a country that aspires to be included into the European educational framework standard. The Bologna Process is the term used to designate the reforms in the European higher education. Its goal is the establishment of the European system of education, promotion of students' and teachers' mobility and accomplishment of higher education based on common criteria and methods. The adoption of the Bologna declaration was followed by various reactions in our country. Some scholars supported it, thinking it would improve the Serbian higher education, others opposed it in the belief that it would ruin our university education, while still others refused to declare their opinions openly. The Bologna Process is significant in that it aims at improving higher education and consequently the quality of studying in accordance with the contemporary social reality. The adoption of the Bologna Process entailed the implementation of certain novel features into the Serbian higher education.

They are regarded differently. Some of these features are the following: introduction of three cycles of higher-education qualifications, evaluation of academic courses, students' mobility, altered teaching methods. The Bologna Process requires students' continuous engagement, i.e., they are obliged to participate actively in classes throughout the academic year. Considering the fundamental requirements of the Bologna Process and the differences between the new and the old higher-education system, there are evident the differences in students' opinions and their attitudes towards studying. The attentive and diligent students, accustomed to persistent acquiring of knowledge, find the Bologna Process rather convenient, unlike their less industrious colleagues, who think it quite unsuitable.

The Bologna Process has two main advantages in comparison to the old higher-education system: it is the student-centered education, which reduces the potential flaws of the old system of university studying and makes it more vibrant, and it is based on the European university framework that facilitates employment after graduation.

The following are certain problems that might occur: insufficient space for teaching, insufficient number of universities teachers, a large number of students in comparison to the number of teachers and facilities, insufficiently developed student body, inadequate use of human, financial and infrastructural resources.

The reform of the European higher education started with the adoption of the Sorbonne declaration in 1988 and was further intensified by the signing of the Bologna declaration in 1999. The main goal of the reform was the creation of the common European framework of knowledge. This represents a dynamic and intricate process since it involves both globalisation and the preservation of national culture, tradition and identity of each of the signatory states. It is essential to respect equality and to become part of Europe and the world, to accept

European values and principles, but to preserve and retain one's own national traits and values at the same time. Thus established, these goals can be achieved only by strengthening intellectual, cultural, social, scientific and technological dimensions in Europe, with the central part occupied by university institutions (Lungulov, 2011, p. 612). Accepting the Bologna Process and ratifying the Bologna Convention on equalising higher-education qualifications in Europe, Serbia declared its decision to adapt its higher education to the general principles prescribed by European universities (Babin, Hiršenberger, & Papić, 2012). The Serbian universities accepted wide and demanding reforms in terms of the reorganisation of studies with the purpose of improving the higher-education quality and developing it in accordance with the European educational standard. The changes were related to each aspect of university education – its organisation and management, changes of course curricula, continuous quality control, modernising teaching methods, upgrading teaching materials and textbooks and increasing students' engagement in classes (Lungulov, 2011, p. 612). Also, one of the goals was to overcome rigidity and conventionality of the education system still unprepared to embrace substantial changes.

Serbian universities began to implement reforms but have been encountering various problems ever since. Reference materials display opposing views of the acceptance of the Bologna declaration and university-education reforms. Unlike European universities, the Serbian universities are relatively loose associations of faculties (Turajlić, Andrejić, Rudić, & Todorović, 2004). Serbian higher education started the reforms unprepared for them, without clearly defined laws, precisely determined graduation degrees, university teachers willing to accept changes, sufficiently informed employers, etc. However, the basic deficiency appears to be the static and strict norms which are difficult to change and adapt to altered social conditions. Therefore, with the standards not following the social needs, higher education has never been stimulated to adapt to new circumstances, to include new knowledge into their study programmes and improve quality in general.

European institutions of higher education have undertaken the task of creating the European framework of higher education. The Bologna declaration was signed by the ministers of education of several European countries in 1999. This act started the Bologna Process, whose goal was the creation of the common European system of university education up to 2010, with the preservation and respect of national diversities (cultures, languages, traditions, etc.). It was the beginning of the creation of a flexible and efficient higher-education system of Europe, competitive in the global market of knowledge. The practical realisation of this idea assumed the following goals (Zečević, 2010, p. 81):

- The system of comprehensible and standardised academic degrees and diplomas.
- The system based on two education cycles – undergraduate (bachelor) studies and postgraduate (specialist, master and doctoral) studies.
- The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).
- Promotion of students' and teachers' mobility.
- The recognition of degrees obtained in other countries.

- Promotion of the European dimension in higher education.

The Bologna declaration supports the idea that higher education should contribute to further European integrations, raise consciousness of common values and shared social and cultural space, facilitate mobility and employment of European citizens, enhance the global recognition and acknowledgment of the European higher education (Petković & Antolović, 2010, p. 198). This can be achieved by the coordination of educational policies of various countries, the adoption of the system of verifiable learning outcomes, the introduction of the ECTS, the adoption of the framework with three cycles of higher-education qualifications and a larger engagement of students into learning and teaching. The Bologna Process has been an ongoing process in the Serbian institutions of higher education for a few years. However, not many empirical researches have studied students' perceptions of the Bologna Process. The authors who have examined this problem so far are Nikolić and Kundačina (2012), as well as Maksimović and Stanislavljević – Petrović (2012).

Modern higher education prescribes less theoretical instruction and more practical and individual work on the part of students, as well as a better teacher-student relationship. Students' individual work is reflected in writing term papers, realising projects, conducting researches, performing analyses, accomplishing various assignments, etc. Moreover, students' interaction in classes is of utmost importance. Students are expected to acquire fundamental knowledge in their academic courses, to qualify for individual lifelong learning, to learn the problem-solving techniques, to develop critical thinking, to gain necessary professional competences, etc. Students' active involvement in teaching is reflected in new aspects of engagement. They are allowed to suggest research topics, manage researches independently, plan their activities, etc. This type of student-centered education differs considerably from the old, traditional mode of teaching, which was teacher-centered and consisted of mere transfer of knowledge (Lungulov, 2011, p. 615). Interactive teaching means that students organise their own process of learning, thus improving their own independence, responsibility, problem-solving abilities, creativity and other mature characteristics. This is the only manner in which students can prepare themselves for employment after graduation, ensure that their degree be recognised in the European labour market and gain competencies for lifelong learning. One of the problems that impedes the teacher-student interaction is a large number of students attending lectures.

Students acquire new knowledge by means of researches, collection of data and relevant information, thus upgrading the previous knowledge and creating a flexible and evolving system of knowledge. The goal is teaching based on exploration, which students approach actively and are able to evaluate it. An engaged approach to studying develops students' curiosity, thirst for knowledge, autonomy and inner motivation.

The Bologna Process has been accepted with great expectations by students. The expectations are mainly related to the improvement of teaching, studying conditions, modernising instruction at universities. The Bologna Process has fulfilled part of the expected outcomes. Its effects cannot be visible without the

appreciation of students' opinions. Students should be regarded as the main initiators of reforms and the main participants in each segment of education.

Teachers, students and educators who implied the Bologna declaration have cherished high expectations from this reform. Scholars disagree on the question whether these expectations are fulfilled or not. It is evident that students are those who have expected most, particularly the improvement of the studying conditions and the reduction of theoretical and outdated knowledge.

They have also hoped that a larger number of elective courses will be introduced and that teaching tools will be modernized. The latter has been accomplished almost in full. Yet, students have hoped that exams will be broken into smaller segments, which would be easier to learn and ultimately pass in the form of midterm tests and pre-exam tasks. This requirement, actually prescribed by the Bologna declaration, is respected by the majority of the Serbian faculties. Students themselves favour this way of taking exams since it has a lot of advantages compared to the old practice. The reform has replaced the "ex cathedra" teaching, when students were merely passive listeners. Despite the obvious advantages of this reform of higher education, it cannot be expected that it will solve all the problems of university education overnight. Both teachers and students need a certain amount of time in order to accept the new conditions imposed by this reform. However, it is worth mentioning that students' engagement and interaction are considerably greater.

Research Methodology

The empirical research presented focuses on the following question: What are the perceptions of the bachelor students of social sciences and humanities about the Bologna Process 15 years after its implementation into the Serbian universities? This question determined the subject matter of the research – the students' attitudes to this problem provided "first hand". The goal of the empirical research was to study of the actual state of affairs in the Bologna Process during 2019/2020 academic year and possibilities to improve its realization, which could be compared to similar relevant researches. The empirical tasks involved the examination of students' attitudes to the requirements, benefits and restrictions of the Bologna Process.

The survey and scaling techniques were used, and the instrument was the questionnaire with the assessment scale (BOL-JM-JOZ). The questionnaire was comprised of five closed-ended questions. The Likert scale had 25 items (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree).

At the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, 150 bachelor students of various departments participated in the research (Departments of Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology). The research sample was comprised of the bachelor first- to third-year students of social sciences and humanities at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš (N= 150) (Table 1).

Table 1. Structure of the Respondents Regarding the Year of Study

		%	Valid %
Valid	First year	43.3	43.3
	Second year	36.0	36.0
	Third year	20.7	20.7
	Total	150	100.0

Analysis and Interpretation of the Research Results

The empirical research was conducted with the students of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš regarding their perceptions of the Bologna Process. Their perceptions were examined by means of the questionnaire and the Likert scale.

Table 2. What does studying by the Bologna process imply?

Crosstabs		Studying by the Bologna process implies ...			Total	χ^2	df	p
		One cycle (bachelor studies)	Two cycles (graduate and postgraduate studies)	Three cycles (bachelor, master and doctoral studies)				
Year of study	First year	5	5	55	65	4.76	4	0.31
	Second year	3	2	49	54			
	Third year	0	4	27	31			
Total		8	11	131	150			

Although the Bologna Process represents a complex concept, it has a significant impact on higher-education efficiency with teachers and students as equal partners. However, students have to be appropriately informed about this concept of studying, and their own rights and obligations. The research results show that the students who participated in the empirical research were well acquainted with the three cycles of higher-education qualifications: bachelor, master and doctoral studies (N=131). The chi-square test and the crosstabulation of the variables displayed no statistically significant difference in the responses of the students of various years of study, which was to be expected since they had probably gathered detailed and relevant information prior to the enrollment in the faculty departments, $p > 0.05$ (Table 2).

Table 3. ECTS Credits

Crosstabulation		What are the ECTS credits?			Total	χ^2	df	p
		European system of credit transfer	European system of credit expansion	European system of credit incorporation				
Year of study	First year	39	2	24	65	22.17	4	0.0001
	Second year	46	0	8	54			
	Third year	25	4	2	31			
Total		110	6	34	150			

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is designed to value students' workload, learning, skills and outcomes based on the defined study programmes and academic courses curricula. The credits represent a shared "currency" in the European system of higher education, earned by students' academic achievement and their exam results (Hadžibrahimović, 2010; Mijušković, Teofanov, Teofanov, & Jelačić, 2010; Van der Wende, 2000). The research results (Table 3) proved that the students of social sciences and humanities were well acquainted with this terminology since the majority of the respondents (N=110) knew what ECTS meant. However, the respondents' answers differed and the chi-square test determined a different modality of the responses, particularly those given by the students of the first year of study, who predominantly selected that the ECTS meant "the European system of credit incorporation" (N=24). The difference was statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.0001$).

Table 4. Evaluation in the Bologna Process

		The Bologna declaration implies:			Total	χ^2	df	p
		Evaluation of teachers by teachers	Evaluation of teachers by Ministry of Education	Evaluation of teachers by students				
Year of study	First year	3	34	28	65	7.33	4	0.12
	Second year	1	22	31	54			
	Third year	2	8	21	31			
Total		6	64	80	150			

The Bologna Process has introduced certain changes into the evaluation of teachers' work – it is evaluated by students. The first reactions to this requirement were rather negative. The results of this research showed no statistically significant difference in the respondents' answers regarding the year of study, $p > 0.05$. However, the respondents valued highly the evaluation of teachers by the Ministry of Education and by students, and these responses were treated as correct answers (Table 4).

Table 5. Knowledge of the System of Credits

		The number of credits per academic year			Total	χ^2	df	p
		60 ECTS	30 ECTS	48 ECTS				
Year of study	First year	60	1	4	65	8.64	4	0.07
	Second year	49	5	0	54			
	Third year	29	2	0	31			
Total		138	8	4	150			

Potential problems could be detected at the very beginning of the implementation of the Bologna Process into the Serbian higher education. The crucial one involved the educational system with as many as twelve exam terms per academic year, an average eight years of studying, frequent retaking of failed courses, poor performance in exams (success rate under 50%) and only a small number of students successfully passing all the exams in the current academic

year. The question arose how to pass all the exams in only three exam terms and gain 60 ECTS credits, and, which was most interesting of all, how to achieve the success rate of 100% (Nikolić & Ružić-Dimitrijević, 2010). The path to the Bologna Process goals had to be directed towards the accomplishment of these tasks. The studying rules had to be changed considerably in order to be completely accorded with the new system of higher education. The research results (Table 5) showed that all of the respondents knew that the number of ECTS credits per academic year was 60. Therefore, the responses did not differ significantly and were $p > 0.05$. The students' attitudes to the ECTS credit system were examined by means of the Likert scale and presented later in the paper.

Table 6. What Does the Bologna Process Promote?

		The Bologna Process promotes:			Total	χ^2	df	p
		Students' passivity	Students' mobility	Less workload				
Year of study	First year	2	19	44	65	55.22	4	0.0001
	Second year	4	41	9	54			
	Third year	2	29	0	31			
Total		8	89	53	150			

Mobility is defined as the possibility for students, teachers and researchers to attend a foreign university during either one semester or academic year or to continue their further studies abroad. Are students well informed about one of the main benefits of the Bologna declaration? The respondents mostly stated that the Bologna process promoted less workload, but the majority of them selected the option that it predominantly promotes students' mobility, which was treated as the correct answer in this research (N=89). A statistically significant difference in the respondents' answers was observed ($p < 0.05$, $p = 0.0001$), which means that they knew how to answer the questions from the questionnaire (Table 6).

The factor analysis was supplied in further statistical analysis of the collected data.

Table 7. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.559
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1542.790
	df	435
	Sig.	0.0001

The value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test was 0.56, while the Bartlett's test showed a statistically significant difference $p = 0.0001$, which proved that the use of the factor analysis was justified (Table 7).

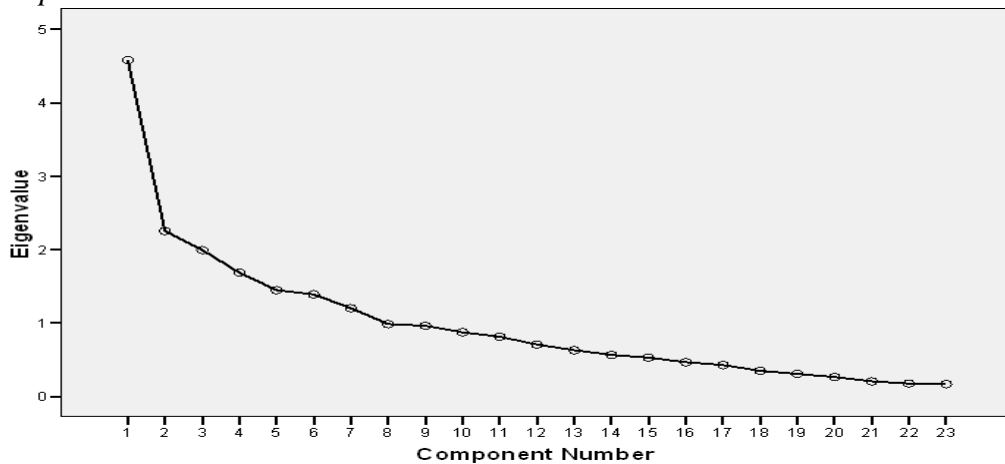
Table 8. Factor Analysis with Extracted Factors

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.581	19.919	19.919	4.581	19.919	19.919
2	2.252	9.790	29.709	2.252	9.790	29.709
3	1.995	8.673	38.382	1.995	8.673	38.382
4	1.686	7.332	45.714	1.686	7.332	45.714
5	1.449	6.298	52.011	1.449	6.298	52.011
6	1.391	6.050	58.061	1.391	6.050	58.061
7	1.201	5.222	63.283	1.201	5.222	63.283
8	0.987	4.290	67.573			
9	0.963	4.188	71.761			
10	0.874	3.801	75.562			
11	0.814	3.539	79.101			
12	0.707	3.076	82.177			
13	0.629	2.737	84.914			
14	0.567	2.466	87.380			
15	0.530	2.304	89.683			
16	0.467	2.031	91.714			
17	0.429	1.866	93.580			
18	0.349	1.518	95.097			
19	0.308	1.338	96.435			
20	0.266	1.155	97.591			
21	0.207	0.900	98.491			
22	0.178	0.772	99.262			
23	0.170	0.738	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 8 exhibits the factors and the explained variance – the initial factors (Initial Eigenvalues), the values of the extracted factors (Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings). The initial factors included all the items from the research instrument. Since the factor analysis was bound to the Kaiser's characteristic squares whose value was over 1, Table 8 displays 7 factors with the characteristic values of 1 and over. Those 7 components account for the total of 63.28% of the variance.

Graph 1. Scree Plot



The presented scree plot shows that 7 factors were extracted in the research. The factors positioned above the point of curvature were retained for further statistical analysis, since the factors below that point followed the decreasing path. However, in order to obtain general perceptions of the students about the studies by the Bologna Process, we kept 5 factors that explained the total of 52.01% of the cumulative variance. These 5 factors were used for further statistical analysis.

Table 9. Attitudes towards the Bologna Declaration

Year of study		I do not object to the Bologna Process, but I object to the manner of its realisation in our universities.	University teachers are not ready to accept the changes created by the Bologna Process.	Students are not ready to accept the changes created by the Bologna Process.	I think that only higher education benefits from the introduction of the Bologna Process.	I think that the Bologna reforms should be applied in the prescribed manner.	I think that the Bologna Process facilitates studying considerably
		First year	M	3.4923	3.1846	2.8000	3.6615
	sd	1.07708	1.22337	1.04881	1.01976	1.03031	1.22219
Second year	M	3.9444	3.6852	3.0741	3.8704	4.3148	4.2407
	sd	.89899	1.04293	1.25671	0.89118	.94817	1.08045
Third year	M	3.6129	3.8710	4.0323	3.9032	3.3548	3.5806
	sd	1.22956	1.23131	.87498	.97826	1.27928	1.20483

F= 9.53; df=2; p=0.0001

The responses provided by the students of social sciences and humanities ranged from indecisiveness to disagreement regarding the application of the Bologna Process reforms in the Serbian educational system (Table 9). The arithmetic mean of the responses shows that the senior students assessed the implementation of the reforms more positively than their younger colleagues. This might indicate that the students of the first year had less experience in studying according to the programmes prescribed by the Bologna declaration in comparison to their more experienced colleagues. A statistically significant difference was observed in their responses, $p < 0.05$, $p = 0.0001$.

Table 10. The Bologna Declaration Advantages

Year of study		Reduced obligatory reading and exam length.	Continuous evaluation of students' achievement	Exams are broken into segments	Students are actively engaged in studying	Students' mobility and recognition of their degrees abroad	Elective academic courses designed according to students' interests	Stimulation of continuous learning
		First year	M	3.9231	3.8769	4.0615	3.8308	3.9692
	sd	.98912	1.05338	0.93336	.87624	0.95147	0.99228	1.11653
Second year	M	4.0926	3.9074	4.1296	3.7222	4.2778	4.0370	3.9074
	sd	0.95697	1.15364	1.13348	.91973	.89899	1.09825	1.24792
Third year	M	3.7097	3.3871	3.9032	3.7419	3.9677	3.5806	3.7742
	sd	0.97275	1.14535	1.04419	1.29016	0.94812	1.33602	1.35916

F=1.83; df=2; p=0.16

Table 10 shows the results related to the students' perceptions of the Bologna declaration. The arithmetic means prove that their responses ranged from indecisiveness to agreement. The highest arithmetic mean is observed in the statements referring to the reduced exam length and obligatory reading, students' mobility and recognition of degrees in foreign countries. The rest of the statements were arranged on the Likert assessment scale, $M < 4.00$. The comparison of the students' responses shows that the students of different years of study expressed

identical opinions. Their responses were homogenous with no statistically significant difference observed, $p > 0.05$. The results prove that the advantages of the Bologna declaration are present and evident, but that this aspect should be evaluated and checked continuously.

Table 11. The Bologna Declaration Shortcomings

Year of study		Insufficient number of classrooms necessary for regular attendance	University teachers face unsustainable workload owing to numerous academic courses	Low learning quality	The number of graduates is increasing	Prolonged education – master studies mandatory at the majority of faculties
First year	M	3.6154	3.4462	3.1692	3.5077	3.6308
	sd	1.07081	0.90192	0.96127	0.90352	1.21924
Second year	M	3.7778	3.3519	3.3333	3.8333	4.0370
	sd	1.09315	1.29086	0.82416	1.07721	0.88941
Third year	M	3.9677	3.6452	4.3871	4.0968	3.7097
	sd	1.16859	0.91464	1.02233	0.97826	1.03902
F= 10.80; df=2; p=0.0001						

The research results pertaining to the statements about the Bologna Process shortcomings show the inconsistency in the participants' responses. The respondents mainly agreed with some of the statements. They did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the downsides of studying according to the Bologna Process. Yet, it means that their personal opinions have to be examined by using some other technique and instrument. Regardless of the obtained results, the sum of the arithmetic means in the ANOVA testing proved that senior students recognised the shortcomings of the Bologna Process better than their younger colleagues. Their responses displayed a statistically significant difference, $p < 0.05$, $p = 0.0001$ (Table 11).

Table 12. The Bologna Process from the Students' Perspective

Year of study		I think that university teachers have to coordinate their criteria and respect the Bologna reforms	I think that there should be fewer pre-exam tasks and more time for studying for final exams	I think that the Bologna Process should be respected in full and that there should be fewer exam terms	I think that the prerequisite for the enrollment in the following academic year is 60 ECTS credits	I think that the old way of studying should be reintroduced.
First year	M	4.0000	3.8462	2.8308	2.4923	2.6769
	sd	0.81009	1.28975	1.25710	1.42657	1.44814
Second year	M	4.3889	4.4444	2.4074	2.0926	2.1667
	sd	0.87775	0.83929	1.43433	1.43104	1.20924
Third year	M	3.6129	3.7097	3.5484	3.3226	3.2258
	sd	1.30837	0.90161	1.20661	1.27507	1.38347
F=3.97; df=2; p=0.02						

Generally speaking, the reforms initiated by the Bologna Process assume the shift of the focus from university teachers, as once domineering figures in teaching, to students, currently in the centre of attention. Therefore, this model of higher education has been termed the student-centered model of studying.

Students' experiences of the higher-education reforms are versatile. Dondur, Pokrajac, and Grbić (2011) state that "a relatively small number of European

universities have started the reformation in line with the Bologna algorithm”, so that, despite numerous positive or nearly positive experiences, no one has been particularly delighted with this reform, especially not students. Quite the contrary, they consider the Bologna Process predominantly as a degradation of university studying, because it “obstructs knowledge and suppresses studying, as an in-depth acquisition of knowledge” (Dondur, Pokrajac, & Grbić, 2011, p. 370). The presented research results support these assumptions. From the perspective of the surveyed students, there is no clearly defined benefit of the realisation of the Bologna Process in higher education. The statements listed in Table 12 were valued more highly by the senior students than by their younger colleagues, particularly the first-year students. Their responses demonstrate a statistically significant difference, $p < 0.05$, $p = 0.02$.

Discussion

The implementation of the Bologna Process into the Serbian higher education still reflects various problems that are either unsolved or solved only partially. Universities are still faced with the problems of inefficient studying, acquisition of amounts of theoretical and unfunctional knowledge, outdated textbooks, insufficient practice and opportunity for students’ researches. Since the very beginning, the higher-education reform has been inadequately prepared, with teachers and students inappropriately informed. Unlike other signatories of the Bologna declaration that regularly organise various activities, such as conferences, seminars and workshops, with the purpose of exchanging experiences and information related to the implementation of the Bologna Process in their respective countries, the institutions in our country do that very rarely, sporadically and selectively (Tomić, 2006). University lectures still lack innovative methods that promote interactive learning – exploration, discovery, problem-solving, differentiating, creativity, receptivity, group or pair work, and other various types of activities (Osmanović Zajić, Maksimović, & Lazić, 2022).

Students are motivated to participate actively in university lectures by the application of novel methods and innovative manner of instruction. Old and outdated methods are associated with the passive part that students used to play in the previous system of higher education. Modern teaching methods inspire students to develop an active attitude towards teaching and to participate in every segment of university teaching through multidimensional interaction. The following are the three fundamental components to be developed in the future as regards higher education:

1. To teach young people how to improve and advance permanently.
2. To teach young people how to use their spare time productively.
3. To teach young people how to socialise and support others, i.e., how to develop their social skills properly (Suzić, 2009).

The analysis of the aforementioned proves that the essence of the Bologna Process has not been implemented yet and that its full realisation is still far from completion. The basic requirement, the competency-based qualifications, has not been fulfilled so far. We live in the time in which the future is already happening. This time is the time of the “future shock” (Toffler, 1970; 1981).

The previous higher-education system was based on general education, whereas the contemporary education system respects the principles postulated by the Bologna Process that is radically destroying the advantages of the old system. The question arises: Why? The answer lies in the fact that there are those who make decision but are unable to see the consequences, on side, and those who refuse to see the reality, on the other.

The Bologna Process can be interpreted as a process of internationalization of higher education, and at the same time, digitalization in all spheres of life, which is becoming especially relevant in today’s realities (Bitieva, Bulavina, & Bitieva, 2021; European Commission, 2021). The altered roles of teachers and students are the direct results of the Bologna Process in higher education. Portela, Sá, Alexandre, and Cardoso (2009, pp. 465-474) state that the accomplishment of this requirement is possible only if both of them are highly motivated. There has been more than a decade since the Bologna Process was implemented into the Serbian higher-education system. Therefore, the experiences of the students studying according to the new reforms and of those who studied in the old system of education can be compared. This could be a topic for some future research.

Digitization has contributed to adaptation in new situations and in all spheres of life, which was highlighted by the European Commission (2021) and the goals of higher education that required the reorganization of teaching and the transition to an e-educational environment. Digital transformation has become one of the key strategic goals of the development strategy of most universities. At that moment, no one expected what followed at the beginning of 2020. All this resulted in the transformation of society through education for the digital age in all aspects of life and learning.

Conclusion

The Bologna declaration is the European document that creates the European higher education area and harmonises the structure of the education system in the signatory countries. The fundamental goal is the creation of the common European higher-education landscape. Yet, as its name suggests it, it is an ongoing process. Thus, it is not surprising that a number of signatory countries has started implementing these reforms only recently.

The Bologna Process requires a period of time necessary for its full implementation and it assumes a number of changes and reforms that one country has to perform in all segments of society. The Bologna declaration preceded the Bologna Process and presumed a series of changes in higher education and in the teacher-student interaction.

The change of the roles of teachers and students in the process of teaching is

reflected in their individual and more active engagement in education. Consequently, their individual involvement has to be continuous and founded on critical thinking. Some further research might be conducted on the positive and negative effects that the Bologna Process has exerted upon the Serbian education system. This paper presents certain parameters necessary for such an analysis and thus contributes to a better perception of the Bologna Process effects on the Serbian higher education. Moreover, this paper aims at encouraging the scholars and academics to examine the Bologna Process in university teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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