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Collaboration in Bologna Process: The Experience of Department of Interior Architecture in Çankaya University

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Abstract

Bologna Process studies in Çankaya University's Interior Design and Architecture Department have been initiated in 2008. This study analyzes the curriculum development efforts in a participatory point of view and the findings of the first stage by providing insights for the next step of the process. As a result of the consensus among professors and questionnaire, program qualifications have been identified and listed. Assessment of questionnaires conducted to students and graduates revised these qualifications. These new qualifications specifically involve the subject-specific ones related with the fundamentals of design processes, history and technical topics of interior architecture; design and construction issues.

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1. Introduction

Lisbon (1997) and Bologna (1999) processes are two milestones for target policy approach of being an information society for increasing the competitiveness of the European Union (EU). Lisbon process aims to establish the most powerful information economy in the European territory as well as establishment of a life-learning system in order to satisfy the qualified human resources required, supporting the vocational education and restructure the higher education infrastructure in order to design a framework. Whereas Bologna Process's (BP) main goal is to set up a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by harmonizing the higher education systems of the 46 countries involved for achieving the Lisbon targets as the ultimate one and to increase the awareness of the European Higher Education system worldwide. Involving 10 action lines (Heitmann, 2005), it includes a motion of reform series (Elias, 2010) to make European Higher Education more compatible and more attractive for students and scholars from other continents. In this regard, two sister processes converge in the areas of improving the transparency and the quality (Saarinen, 2005) of the higher education systems as well as facilitation of the students and graduates' mobility. In this regard, it can also be said that the Bologna process also aims to increase the overall effectiveness of the higher education in Europe. To do that, Bologna Agreement includes principles some of which are uniform degree structures, a system of credits and increase in joint programs.

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The most important aspect of the process is the framework we mentioned in the above paragraph which is classified into two: The overarching framework for qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA) and European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL) (Durman, 2010). In fact, these frameworks are two different approaches for the same goal which is also assumed as the ultimate references for comparing the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) we will mention next. These two can also be attributed the top-level rings of a hierarchical chain in which NQF stands one level below. NQF is the umbrella concept which connects the program qualifications and learning outcomes to the needs of the society and initiates a system approach involving a wider links to other areas of education and training outside higher education such as the lifelong learning as a permanent process. In addition to student knowledge and abilities, improvement of students' independent study and responsibility taking competencies, learning competency, communication and social competencies as well as area-specific competencies establish main elements of the NQF. Stakeholder involvement and self certification (EC, 2009) are the integral parts of the NQF development process.

Program outputs and learning outcomes in fact constitutes the remaining lower level ring and the beginning point of this hierarchical chain, and an innovative shift from teacher-centred education to a student centred one. Focusing on the department basis, program outputs mainly deal with improving students' competences which is defined as a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities (Kehm, 2010) in regard to national qualifications, sectoral qualifications and educational goals. Thus program qualifications are providing the basis not only for harmonizing the teaching system with the Bologna process but also the connection of the institution with NQF. In all stages of the program qualifications process, continuous quality improvement via quality assurance systems is vital.

Attached directly to the educational goals program qualifications also involve a complicated process including performance criteria, formulation of educational strategies, participation of the related stakeholders, measurement and data collection and finally the assessment (Özkale, 2010). Accordingly, program outputs and learning outcomes (Lizzio et al., 2002; Anderson et al., 2005; Harden, 2007; Pierce & Mar Robisco, 2009) vary on department basis and curricula should be redesigned in order to reflect the learning outcomes (Kennedy et al., 2006; Meyers & Nulty, 2009). Lastly, program output context is one of the most traceable process in managerial terms and involve the participation of the experts in the area, in other words, it is a process in which the closest to the problem makes the call, hence increase its effectiveness as the case was in Çankaya University's Department of Interior Architecture (INAR).

Turkey has been included in BP initiated in 2001. Since then, signature and ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and establishment of a committee of formulation of the NQF are the main developments to be noted. The committee in question prepared the draft NQF in 2007 and in the same year a supplementary "National Qualification Working Group" has been established for supporting the process in collaboration. We should note that NQF mainly internalized EQF-LLL as the main approach (HEC, 2009). In accordance with the process Çankaya University's INAR has initiated the process as of 2008. In fact, this stream is the one which designates the main timeframe of our study.

In the light of what we have stated above; this study's purpose has twofold; the first one is to design the required program qualifications' framework which will be applicable for the INAR as well as the roadmap to manage future developments in a way that they will be realized mainly in a student-oriented manner. Regarding the fact that the process is pretty new for Turkish universities, the second purpose is to enlighten preliminary steps to be achieved by other universities and similar departments via sharing the experiences during activities. Accordingly, following the introduction, developments in INAR along with the process and mission requirements will be overviewed. In the third part, the result of the study involving student expectations and formulation of program qualifications will be discussed. The conclusion part includes the last revision and final listing of qualifications as well as future steps to be undertaken for improvement of the process.

2. Milestones of Process Improvement in the Department of Interior Architecture

BP in INAR has been mainly guided by INAR's vision and strategic plan led the University's overall mission and targets. Overall mission of the University included tips that might also be related to BP such as establishment of new departments which is mainly concentrated on interior architecture and related ones, development of job placement opportunities for fresh graduates and improvement of academic promotion opportunities by mainly focusing on domain-specific criteria. Moreover, additional tips included new changes including quality measurement, enhancement sustainable innovative and updated course contents. Quality improvement emphasis also included physical and technical facilities such as the laboratories as well as required course material.

In relation with the University mission, a SWOT analysis has been conducted in INAR for a "local strategy" formulation. SWOT analysis results indicated that for improving department's research potential, learning environment (Vermuelen & Schmidt, 2008) should be further developed and that some new criteria should be introduced. In fact, it has been contemplated by department management that BP framework would be an efficient tool for internalizing the related vision. While each department implemented its own BP timetable, INAR began preparations for the new infrastructure. Seven main developments in sequence since the beginning of the process have been achieved.

- **Program qualifications:** Through the participation of all full-time instructors in the department, program qualifications are formulated with reference to departmental goals and objectives.
- **Questionnaires:** Preparation of two questionnaire forms called as "department entry questionnaire" (DENQ) for freshman students and "department exit questionnaire" (DEXQ) for the potential graduate seniors. DENQ and DEXQ results shed light to the identification stage.
- **Revision:** Revision of program qualifications along with DENQ and DEXQ results will be discussed in detail in the following section.
- **Calculation:** INAR course credits have been recalculated according to ECTS system which specifies credits of each course in association with workloads. During this process, the workload has been reduced in a way to get adopted in ECTS credits and to present a more user-friendly course interface. Time spent information has been gathered by the students for each course and course workloads have been reformulated accordingly. Hence at the end of this stage, INAR curricula have also been modified.
- **Redesign:** According to new curricula requirements, course definition forms have been redesigned after calculation of the course credits and some corrections of the expressions in the forms according to the Bloom's Taxonomy (Savic, 2008) are made. In this period, although each professor was responsible of his/her own course(s), a departmental committee checked the wordings of each one. Furthermore, the content of each course examined in details in order to prevent content duplications. Within this framework, contents and titles of some courses has changed. Finally, the contribution of each course to each program specification was identified over the scale of four.
- **Communication with stakeholders:** Involved list of the graduates' names and establishment of e-mail groups by which another questionnaire is to be submitted for the assessment of department qualifications also by graduate students. Some of the graduates replied to questionnaires and provided opinions on the potential changes to be made.
- **Meetings:** For better tracking the process; INAR chair participated in BP meetings which were mostly organized in national scope by the participation of different universities and held in different times. Those meetings provided an information exchange environment with national authorities as well as other universities.

3. Entry and Exit Questionnaire Results and Identification of Program qualifications

3.1. Sample and brief questionnaire content

In this section, we basically concentrate on the first and second stages of the BP in INAR and analyze them to observe student contribution on identification of the program qualifications. DENQ was a document which

contained 15 questions just like DEXQ. Both questionnaires had a similar content, where, the only difference was that DENQ was assessing student “expectations” whereas DEXQ student “acquisitions” after 4 years of education in the department. DENQ has been implemented to 29 over 30 freshman, whereas DEXQ to been implemented to 46 over 49 graduates.

In both questionnaires; samples were asked to answer questions in the areas of specific knowledge, abilities and competences on interior design. These qualifications include problem solving, analysis and synthesis of the data, life-long learning, doing research, individual and team work, communication abilities, following up contemporary developments in design, creativity, aesthetics, spatial and environmental sensitivity, visual, oral and written presentation, ethical, social, legal and professional responsibility, innovativeness and entrepreneurship.

3.2. Results

Around 93% of the seniors agreed that they acquired the required technical knowledge whereas 83% of them agreed that they had the satisfactory skills on making and implementing contemporary design proposals. Around 80% of the seniors agree acquired the talent of using modern tools and techniques during project implementations. 82% of the students claimed that they had the required research abilities and access to resource possibilities. In relation with this issue 98% of the students stated that they were able to analyze and interpret data and use it within design processes. For DENQ related ratios were almost %100 for the first two issues and 87%, 87% and 90% for the remaining issues respectively.

Most “surprising results” firstly appeared in the areas of teamwork versus individual work conducts. Only 57% of the students agreed on the topic which showed that the department basically guided teamwork whereas 97% agreed that INAR was mainly guided them for individual work. Moreover, less than half of the students agreed that they acquired satisfactory written and oral communication skills and ability to search the literature in native language. Related ratios were 87%, 73%, 87% for DENQ respectively.

The second series of surprises appeared in the area of effective communication and literature search abilities in a foreign language. For both areas, around the half of students agreed that they have acquired the necessary skills, where, related ratio was 91% for DENQ.

81% of the seniors agreed that they acquired the necessary skills for interpreting findings of a research in a visual and written way (In DENQ this ratio was 97%). In DENQ, 97% of the students expected that they would acquire life learning abilities at the end of four years whereas this ratio was 89% for DEXQ.

Finally, 74% of the seniors agreed that they acquired satisfactory awareness on project management and legal consequences of work security implementations. DEXQ results also showed that %83 of the students acquired awareness for topics such as innovation, entrepreneurship and environmental consequences of professional applications. Related ratios were 87% and almost 100% for DENQ.

To sum up, except “surprising results” group, results of both questionnaires almost matched. For DEXQ; it has been observed that INAR provides satisfactory knowledge acquisition for the assessment of spatial problems and problem solving skills. However, seniors saw themselves as less capable for the implementation of the acquired knowledge in the field, which signals that more practical course contents would be designed within BP. DENQ mostly indicated that students were conscious on department selection for academic studies, however should be provided more detailed information about the education and future knowledge acquisition. Next section summarizes the following works undertaken.

3.3. Assessment of results for program qualifications' formulation

INAR board conducted multiple meetings for assessing and discussing the results deduced from two questionnaires for reaching a list of program qualifications to be included in the course content list. Although student expectations and acquisitions in a basket helped INAR revise credits, contents and workloads of courses in the program, program qualifications were accepted with minor changes for all courses given in the department to be

able to reflect departments' vision more efficiently on the process. The following qualifications formulate the bundle of undergraduate program qualifications in INAR.

The first group of qualifications mostly involves the practicality problem and addresses further empowerment of the theoretical knowledge in a way that students will learn its implementation in the field (in other words "vocational knowledge"). In this context, the first qualification is the supply of adequate fundamental knowledge in design, history and technical topics of interior architecture; and ability to use the theoretical, methodological and applied information to practice the discipline of interior architecture. The second qualification which is the sensibility to the built environments and interior spaces aims to identify the needs of these environments and spaces through a critical rationalist standpoint. This goal has also influenced the third qualification; being as the proficiency to propose and apply contemporary, creative and aesthetical solutions and ability to apply a proposal under social, physical and economical limitations, and within the framework of aesthetic values and user needs.

Although students were quite satisfied, as a basic mission of the department; the second group of qualifications mostly include further development of the technical knowledge and deepening the ability of proper research and project undertaking abilities. Here, proficiency to sustain designer's notion from the beginning of the design process to the finalization of the construction process and to devise, select and effectively use the tools, techniques and technologies related to design, drawing, software and construction is the first outcome along with the access to the related information. Moreover, analysis of the collected data, to synthesize diverse information and ideas, and to interpret findings; and ability to use them in the process of interior architectural design is an additional qualification formulated by the department.

The third group of the qualifications formulated addresses the "surprising results" which has appeared as the most problematic issue in INAR. To improve students' communication and presentation capabilities, three program qualifications cover development of teamwork efficiency, ability to work individually ability of written and oral communication abilities in both native and foreign languages and lastly ability to present design ideas, analysis, findings, proposals and assessments with proper visual media; and ability to report them when it is necessary.

The last group of program qualifications consolidates the recognition of life long learning with knowledge in a way that students would be capable of following scientific and the technological developments in the field. At the same token, awareness of disciplinary, scientific and ethical responsibilities concerning the field of interior architecture is discussed as another qualification. Additionally, proficiency and grasping of the professional life practices such as construction and project management and emphasis on the related occupational legal consequences, employee health and work security is included in the list of program qualifications. The last qualification of INAR is to bring students in the consciousness of the universal, social and environmental effects of works of interior architecture, proficiency in field related entrepreneurship and innovation.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to show the current situation of BP progress in Çankaya University's INAR. In the first phase, it can be deduced that INAR actively implemented BP in a relatively advanced state when compared to other departments in the University. Here, program qualifications have planned in a way to improve curricula effectiveness in overall terms and to enhance students retrieve knowledge, ability and competence from the content. As a result of the process requirement undertakings, overlaps in curricula have been avoided and student workload includes has been rebalanced for a more professional and realistic look at the domain. The new credit system has also induced consideration of student workloads as the prior issue while deemphasizing instructors' personal constraints.

The second phase of the BP which is currently in progress aims to improve the student centered approach. For this, a more detailed DENQ was being formulated to further comprehend student expectations on desired competencies and expectations during their life in INAR. As a result of the second phase, it has been anticipated to get more detailed program qualifications which will be revised in a more student-oriented manner.

Finally, primary further research area includes mainly the ones related with the NQF connection, some of which, in fact, constrained themselves the INAR experience. In this context, identification of different departmental-basis

characteristics and convergence of related patterns can be the first area of research. Secondly, in a micro sense, collaboration of students, stakeholders, instructors and graduates seems as the first challenge ahead INAR, where, development and sustainability of a similar platform constitutes an area of further research.

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