

The BA in English Studies Programmes in Hungary and the Bologna Process

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Abstract. The study focuses on the Hungarian situation regarding the BA in English Studies programmes in the light of the goals and achievements of the Bologna Process in Europe. It reviews key documents of the Bologna Process, analyses the documents that create the framework of BA in English Studies programmes at a national level and relate these to the aims and objectives of Bologna.

Results show that the framework for the first cycle English Studies programme in Hungary is not in line with the aims of the Bologna process. The system and the structure of such degree programmes as well as the definition of the aims and content indicate that the compatibility of the programmes are not enhanced, employability of graduates are not taken into consideration and lifelong learning is not promoted. These findings suggest that the issue of language-related degree programmes should be given focused attention involving policy-makers, higher education institutions and stakeholder groups.

Key words: *Bologna Process, curriculum design, English Studies, higher education, needs analysis.*

Introduction

Recruitment to modern language degree programmes has declined in the EU in the past decades (Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000; Kelly & Jones, 2003; Coleman, 2004). In order to understand this phenomenon, we mention two reasons here. One is the emergence of English as a *lingua franca*, a manifestation of globalisation world-wide (Hüppauf, 2004, p.4). Indeed, English has become the world language of science and is becoming the language of higher education as well (Coleman, 2006). This means that the demand for the use and learning of other modern languages as an L2 has lowered throughout Europe (Eurydice, 2008). The other phenomenon relates to the attractiveness of programmes focusing on Modern Philology. It appears that students no longer find the traditional literary content of language-related programmes useful. As a result, approximately half of the Modern Philology Departments in the UK were closed in the course of the past two decades due to the lack of students' demand for such courses (Kelly & Jones, 2003). Similar tendencies have been reported from other countries of the EU as well (Mackiewicz, 2005). In Hungary, where higher education is regarded as public good, the state control is very strong, and a large proportion of students do not pay a fee, Modern Philology Departments have not been closed despite the fact that the number of students attracted to modern language studies, including English, has declined here too (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number of first year students in Hungary
(source: <www.felvi.hu>)

Year	BA in English	BA in German	BA in French
2006	1428	790	438
2008	1009	433	345

The decline of language degree programmes coincide in time with the birth, development and implementation of the Bologna Process throughout Europe including Hungary, and this paper sets out to investigate the impacts

of the Bologna Process on the characteristic features of first degree programmes in Modern Languages. Throughout the paper, focused attention will be given to English Studies programmes. A reason for this is that English has a unique status quo in Hungary, being the most frequently used and learned L2 in the country (Eurydice, 2008, p.62, 70). As such, it stands the best chances of all languages to be regarded as useful by students.

The question we ask in this paper is the following: To what extent are the aims, structure and content of BA in English Studies programmes in line with the purposes and principles of the Bologna Process? In order to answer this question, first we will review the official Bologna documents and the context in which they were formed in order to see why 47 countries found it important to sign the Bologna Declaration, and what aims these countries wish to achieve by forming an European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Secondly, we will give a brief review of the Hungarian achievements with a focus on language-related degrees. Thirdly, we will examine how the official documents that determine the framework of the BA in English Studies programmes at a national level relate to the purposes of Bologna.

The Bologna Process

The Bologna Process is a response of European higher education to the developmental challenges of our globalised world. It sets the goals of sustainable innovation and constant renewal. Below is a review of key documents looking at the process and its achievements. First, we will address the reasons behind the launch of the reform and look at its main aims and objectives, and secondly, we will examine what has been achieved so far and what seem to be the weaknesses.

Bologna Declaration: rationale, aims and principles

A key document of the process is the Bologna Declaration (1999) which acknowledges the common challenges, both

internal and external, European higher education needs to meet in order to contribute to the aim of making the EU

“the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (Lisbon European Council, 2000).

These challenges are the following: the growth and diversification of higher education, the employability of graduates, the shortage of skills in key areas and the expansion of private and transnational education. As a response to these challenges, the declaration calls for the creation of a European Higher Education Area, and determines two main goals. One of them is to achieve “greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education” in order to foster the employability and mobility of graduates, and the other goal is to increase the international competitiveness of Europe in order to “ensure that the European higher education system acquires a worldwide degree of attractiveness” to students from other regions of the world (Bologna Declaration, 1999).

In line with the main goals, the Bologna Declaration identifies six objectives: (1) the creation of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, (2) the adaptation of a two-tier higher education system (which now also includes PhD studies as the third cycle), (3) the implementation of a credit system, (4) the promotion of student and academic staff mobility, (5) the promotion of quality assurance at an European level, and (6) the promotion of the European dimension in higher education. It is stressed throughout the document, that standardisation and uniformisation are not the aims of the reform, rather it is a process whereby convergence is created and autonomy and diversity are greatly valued (as stated originally in the *Magna Charta Universitatum* signed by rectors of European Universities in Bologna in 1988). Another important aspect of the declaration, and indeed the process, is that its aims and objectives are not mandatory since (higher) education is one of the issues regulated at a national level in the EU.

The European Higher Education Area in 2010

The official launch of the European Higher Education Area took place in Budapest and Vienna in March 2010. Its official document acknowledges the efforts that actors in higher education throughout Europe have put into the realisation of this “unprecedented ... cooperation” and announces the continuation of the process in the next decade in order for “the full and proper implementation of the agreed objectives” (Budapest-Vienna Declaration, 2010). This indicates that despite the official opening of the EHEA, further work needs to be done towards the fulfilment of the Bologna objectives (see section *Bologna Declaration: Rationale, aims and principles*).

Assessment of the reform’s achievements (Westerheiden et al., 2010) shows that most success has been reached at the level of policy making. Legislation and regulation at a national level have been implemented in most participating countries. This means that the three-cycle structure has been introduced, and that the application of ‘Bologna tools’ (i.e. diploma supplement, ECTS) has also been made

possible, even if to a varying extent, in the EHEA. There are some issues, however, which need to be addressed in the future, such as the development of national qualifications frameworks, guidelines for quality assurance, the implementation of student-centred learning and the strategy for further increasing student and academic staff mobility. It also remains a question how the EHEA will be able to promote its higher education system globally in order to gain a larger market share in world-wide competition.

The reform has been strongly criticised by several stakeholder groups, such as teachers, students and representatives of the labour market, on the grounds that they have not been fully involved in the decision making and development processes. In other words, it seems that Bologna has been a rather top-down process so far. As a result, the implementation of the changes at the level of higher education institutions and study programmes is very far from complete. Another problem is that, in different countries, some changes unrelated to the Bologna process and not mentioned in its official documents were carried out and communicated to a wider audience and attributed to the aims and principles of the EHEA.

The achievements of the Bologna Process in Hungary

According to the assessment report on the first decade of the Bologna Process (Westerheiden et al., 2010), the Hungarian situation is the following: (1) the country did not have a cyclical degree system prior to Bologna, (2) at present a 180+120+180 structure model is adopted with regard to credit points, (3) four fields of study are excluded from the two-cycle structure: architecture, arts, law and medical science, (4) 58 percent of students are enrolled in two-cycle degree programmes, (5) the ECTS, where credits are allocated to courses based on estimated student work load, but without using learning outcomes, is used in the country, (6) the diploma supplement is in use and is issued in Hungarian and English, (7) the quality assurance system is changing very slowly, (8) prior learning is recognised only in some specific cases, (9) the national qualifications framework is not developed, and (10) the issue of student-centred learning has not been addressed.

These results show that most changes have taken place at the level of regulations while the in-depth implementation has not begun in Hungary either. Indeed, as we shall see below, after the creation of the three-cycle degree system, an unfamiliar structure in Hungarian higher education, several issues of programme development have not been addressed in detail or have been overlooked.

English Studies programmes in the Bologna Process

The situation before Bologna

Before Bologna, modern language degree programmes including English were strongly related to teacher education in Hungary. At college level, language teachers for upper primary schools (ages 10–14) and lower secondary schools (ages 14–16) were trained, while at university level students were educated to teach in secondary schools (ages 14–18). In this concurrent model, the degree programmes had strong language-related

components at both levels focusing on proficiency in and the linguistic, literary and cultural aspects of English (Bárdos, 2009, p.37). It is also important to note that most of these programmes resulted in joint degrees, where both majors were given equal focus, thereby making it possible for graduates to teach two subjects in schools. We can see that languages and language-related issues in these cases were studied for a useful and profitable reason: to gain a profession and to become a language teacher. In the same vein, further studies after graduation could lead to postgraduate diplomas in translation and interpretation in the country. In any case, it was only a minority of university students who decided to give up the education module of their study programme and give even more focus to theoretical work and research, mostly with the aim to continue their studies towards a doctorate after graduation. (They graduated as philologists, not as teachers.)

English Studies and the new degree system

The introduction of the cyclical degree structure in 2005 brought radical changes. The Government Decree 289/2005, which establishes the two-tier system, determines the names of degree programmes at the two levels as well as the number of credits allocated to each programme. At the same time, a consecutive model of teacher education is also introduced by the decree. Education of teachers for the ages 10–18 is to be carried out at a master's level exclusively, and that 180 *relevant* credits accumulated at bachelor's level are a prerequisite for the admission to a master's in English teaching. A master's degree in teaching must be a joint major degree, therefore students need to study two majors in the second cycle (e.g. English and French, English and History etc.).

From the point of view of the first degree, this regulation means that students of English do not graduate as teachers, and they do not receive a qualification to pursue any other professions either. The name of such a degree is 'English Studies', and the qualification issued is 'philologist in English'. (Note the identity in name of this qualification and the one having been issued, before Bologna, after 5 years of modern philology studies.) Another important point is that the system does not comprise joint degrees in the first cycle, therefore, graduates in modern languages receive a single degree at the end of their studies.

Comparing these decisions with the aims and principles of the Bologna Process several problems become apparent. One of them is that while the structural changes in the degree system make the levels of the English Studies programmes more comparable internationally, there is no reason to assume that the related decisions of the decree enhance the compatibility of such programmes. Indeed, evidence exists that teacher training is carried out in a concurrent way in several countries within the EHEA (e.g. Germany, UK), and no argument is put forward regarding the primacy of a consecutive model in the official Bologna documents (Nagy, 2009, p.309). This suggests that *the compatibility of Hungary's English-related study programmes may not be enhanced by the introduction of the new model.*

The second problem area is that while concurrent models of teacher education prevailed in higher education and were accepted by stakeholders in the country between 1945 and 2005 (Bárdos, 2009, p.36), the recent changes are radical, very sudden and lack careful preparation and negotiation with stakeholder groups (Galambos, 2007). Needs analyses did not precede the decision, and solid consensus was not established between representatives of the Education and Humanities faculties either (author's own experience as institutional representative in the Humanities Consortium for Bologna). Such sweeping changes in the process might mean that stakeholders find it problematic to relate to the new degrees at both levels and especially in the case of the first degree. As mentioned above, the name of the qualification ('philologist') suggests that the holder of the degree has specialised knowledge in history, literature and linguistics. At this point, however, it is only logical to ask how many career opportunities are open in Hungary and elsewhere for such specialists holding a degree. To our knowledge, no relevant systematic research has been carried out in this country to answer the question.

It is one of the aims of Bologna to create a flexible degree system, whereby it becomes possible to gain general knowledge, skills and competences in the first cycle that enable a large number of graduates to enter the labour market, and to make it possible for them to return to their studies at a master's level when and if they need more specialised knowledge. The third problem relates to this aim. In the case of modern languages, this logic appears to be reverse, because modern philology (i.e. specialised knowledge) is the focus of the bachelor programmes, and graduates are forced to continue their studies at a master's level if they wish to become teachers, translators or interpreters. From a financial point of view, this means that Hungarian students and their families are probably forced to invest more into starting a career than those in other European countries or indeed in Hungary before Bologna.

The fourth problem relates to the decision that only single degrees can be obtained at a bachelor's level. Evidence exists that a growing number of modern language programmes have been offered as joint degrees in Europe as a response to student needs and labour market requirements (The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000; Kelly and Jones, 2003), and programmes combining business, journalism or tourism studies with modern languages have been especially popular. This possibility, however, is rejected in the single degree structure of the Hungarian first cycle. Taking the above problems into consideration, *it appears that the new degree system does not enhance the employability of modern language graduates at a bachelor level*, which is another important goal of the Bologna process.

The aims, structure and content of the BA in English Studies programmes

The 15/2006 ministerial decree creates the framework of English Studies programmes. As such, it defines the goals and objectives, the structure and the content as well as the number of credits allocated to the whole and each section of the programme. The overall goal is worded as follows:

“to train specialists who possess theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of English Studies and in general areas of the Social Sciences, and who are able to use this knowledge for the purposes of theory and practice, in order to pursue their profession in an inter- and multidisciplinary way. Graduates will possess the necessary in-depth theoretical knowledge in order to continue their studies in the second cycle” (author’s translation).

It is important to note that the term ‘profession’ is mentioned in the document three times without defining what this profession exactly is. Instead, the following areas of the labour market are mentioned briefly: local governments, cultural life, media and tourism. As has been mentioned above, the introduction of the new degrees was not preceded by systematic needs analyses. Still, it is safe to claim that language-related knowledge and competences can be useful in many other areas of the labour market as well. The question remains, however, whether employers prefer (1) graduates specialised in a given field and with proficiency in and knowledge and skills related to English or (2) philologists.

The structure of the programme consists of the following building blocks: foundation courses relating to academic studies in general (10–12 credits), foundation courses relating to English Studies (30–40 credits), specific courses in different areas of English Studies (70–80 credits), further specialised courses in English (50 credits), while in the case of students wishing to continue their studies at a master’s level and become teachers, these courses must be chosen from the field of another school subject (e.g. history, geography, mathematics, another modern language etc.) because teacher education programmes at a master’s level are joint degrees. Elective courses (10 credits) are also part of the programme, and for students with the inclination to become a teacher, it is compulsory to choose courses in Pedagogy and Psychology. The regulations also state that two specialisations, British English and North American Studies can be part of the programmes with a maximum of 50 credits, and that students are required to write a dissertation (4 credits) as well. The defined content areas are the following: development of C1 language proficiency in the four skills, academic English, translation, grammar, theoretical and applied linguistics, history of the language and the literature, culture and history of English speaking countries.

We have seen above that an important goal of the BA programme is to provide solid theoretical foundations for further studies at a master’s level. Looking at the structure and the content areas it becomes apparent that they serve this goal well; the learners are given many opportunities to develop theoretical knowledge on the historical, linguistic and literary aspects of the language throughout the programme. It is also apparent that students are expected to decide, at an early stage of their bachelor studies, what study path they wish to take. Only by accumulating 50 credits in another field and 10 credits in Pedagogy and Psychology does it become possible to continue their studies for a master’s degree in teaching without losing time and money. But what happens to students who need more time to make such an important decision, or to graduates who realise only after some years that they

would like to return to their studies again? To obtain the necessary 60 credits later would mean two semesters of extra studies in Hungary. Another question is whether students find it motivating and useful to spend a large number of their working hours on modern philology if they plan to enter the labour market after graduation. It is probable that the content of a large number of courses do not seem relevant for their career purposes. A danger is that students may lose motivation and drop out of the system. *These problems indicate that this structure is not flexible enough to encourage lifelong learning. Prior learning is not recognised but pre-defined and required. Also, the content is strongly focused on aspects of modern philology and, therefore, probably equally disregards the needs of students and the labour market.*

Conclusion

We have seen that the EHEA has been developed and launched in order to enhance the comparability, compatibility and attractiveness of European higher education institutions and the degree programmes they offer. While the implementation of the process has been slower than expected and many weaknesses are apparent, the goals and objectives set in 1999 are still valid today, and member countries are prepared to put their efforts into the further development and implementation of the process.

In this paper, we have investigated how the aims, structure and content of BA English Studies programmes, as defined in relevant decrees, relate to the goals and principles of this far-reaching process. While the comparability of the degree has been enhanced, there are doubts regarding the enhancement of its compatibility. Also, the employability of a large number of graduates can be questioned because the degree does not give them a profession, and it is not possible for students to combine English with another field of studies in the form of a joint degree either. As a consequence, language students need to continue their studies at a master’s level if they wish to lay the foundations of their careers.

The aims, structure and content of the degree programme also indicate that the decrees intend to keep students in higher education for as long as possible. In the first cycle, the content strongly focuses on issues of modern philology, while language-related professions, such as teaching, translating, interpreting, can be obtained at a postgraduate level only. This regulation goes against the principles of the Bologna process relating to flexible learning routes and lifelong learning, and probably disregards the needs of the labour market and puts extra financial burden on the students and their families.

Taking these problems into consideration, it would be useful if the issue of language-related degrees were given focused attention again in Hungary. By re-opening this agenda, it would be possible to carry out needs analyses of stakeholder groups, to evaluate and compare the results with the present situation and to take well-informed decisions on the basis of a consensus between the actors of the process. This would make it possible for higher education institutions to define how the aims, content and

learning outcomes of BA programmes relate to those at a master's level, and what knowledge, skills and competences should be developed at each level. Also, more attention could be given to methodological issues in order to facilitate the cognitive and personal development of a large number of students in a new system.

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Vengrijos humanitarinių mokslų bakalauro (anglų filologijos) studijų programos: Bolonijos proceso kontekstas

Santrauka

Kaip teigiama Bolonijos deklaracijoje (1999), Europos aukštojo mokslo erdvės tikslas yra atsileipti iššūkiams, susijusiems su aukštojo mokslo plėtra ir jo diversifikacija, absolventų įsidarbinimo galimybėmis, jų darbo įgūdžių tam tikrose veiklos srityse trūkumu, taip pat ir privatus bei daugiašalis lavinimosi plėtra. Straipsnyje analizuojama Vengrijos pirmosios pakopos anglų kalbos studijų programos, siekiant iširti, kaip jos atitinka Bolonijos proceso tikslus ir principus. Nors bakalauro programos palyginamumas nuolat stiprėja, vis dėlto kyla abejonių dėl jo suderinamumo. Be to, kyla klausimų ir dėl absolventų įsidarbinimo galimybių, nes laipsnis dar nesuteikia jiems profesijos, ir neįmanoma suderinti anglų kalbos su kuria nors kita mokslo sritimi, taip įgyjant abiemis sritims bendrą mokslinį laipsnį. Todėl kalbų studentai, norintys padėti pamatus savo profesijai, turi stoti į magistrantūros studijas. Pirmosios pakopos arba ciklo studijų turinys yra stipriai orientuotas į šiuolaikinės filologijos dalykus, o tokios profesijos, kaip kalbos dėstymas, vertimas raštu ar žodžiu gali būti įgyjamos tik antroje (magistrantūros) studijų pakopoje. Tokia tvarka yra priešinga Bolonijos proceso principams, kurie siejasi su lankstaus studijavimo bei mokymosi visą gyvenimą galimybėmis. Ji ignoruoja darbo rinkos poreikius, be to uždeda papildomą finansinę naštą studentams ir jų šeimoms.

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