

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Globalization, the Bologna Process and dilemmas of higher educational organizational changes in the former Soviet countries

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Research Domain: Management, leadership, governance and quality (MLGQ)

Abstract:

This paper attempts to analyze higher education organizational changes in the contemporary Republic of Tajikistan in the context of the reforms initiated by the creation of the European Higher Education Area. Tajikistan national educational strategies widely proclaim joining and gaining a membership in the Bologna Process to build a competitive education system and to join the world educational space (Tajikistan, 2012). However, the integration of the Bologna principles into the higher education system appeared to be more complex and challenging. Preliminary findings suggest that the highly centralized higher education system does not allow institutions to exercise their autonomy and accountability. Tajikistan is building Bologna structures mainly within the Ministry of Education and Science, instead of creating independent monitoring and implementation agencies. Faculty shared concerns about lack of government guidance on how to implement the reforms.

References:

Tajikistan (2012). National Strategy of Education Development till 2020

Paper:

For the past several decades higher education institutions in the former Soviet Union experienced significant organizational changes due to external pressures such as market influences, globalization, massification and diverse student body (Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007). They continuously have to respond to national and regional economic and social demands as well as to the global and national policy agendas. Academics have widely studied the globalization process, and its effects on higher education and the focus of such studies were primarily directed to western higher education institutions and less on other parts of the world including post-soviet countries (Bakcha, 2015). However, globalization and the increased role of international organizations (World Bank, OECD, and

European Union) are also playing a significant role in higher education in former Soviet Union countries. For instance, the European initiative such as the Bologna Process has been playing one of the dominant roles of higher education reforms not only within Europe but globally. It intended to establish a common structure of study programs and degrees, the introduction of a credit system and recognition of credentials through a “diploma supplement” as well as quality assurance measures and student mobility (Teichler, 2012).

Drawing on the concepts of glonacal agency heuristic (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002) this paper attempts to analyze higher education organizational changes in the contemporary Republic of Tajikistan in the context of the reforms initiated by the creation of the European Higher Education Area. Tajikistan national educational strategies widely proclaim joining and gaining membership in the Bologna Process to build a competitive education system and to join the “world educational space” (Tajikistan, 2012). The purpose of this paper is to analyze and examine the implications of the Bologna Process in Tajikistan and explore how Tajik universities respond to the incorporation of the Bologna principles such as degree changes, quality assurance, and doctoral education reforms. What changed/unchanged over the years of their implementation? How do universities deal with challenges and complexities they face in putting these reforms into practice. The research is based on qualitative methodology and includes multiple case studies and semi-structured interviews with senior and junior administrators and faculty members of Tajik higher education institutions located in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

The preliminary findings suggest that the globalization and the Bologna Process have opened new challenges for higher education institutions in national contexts. There are certain dilemmas in the incorporation of principles of the Bologna in Tajikistan. First of all, the Bologna Process was introduced in Europe where institutions operate according to the Humboldtian values where shared organizational culture and decentralized governance instruments is a core of the higher education systems (Shaw et al., 2013.). Although the Law on Higher and Professional Education of Tajikistan declares the autonomy, its definition is different from what is generally understood in Europe and the West (EUA, 2009; DeYoung and Valyaeva, 2013). According to the Law, “university autonomy is the highest form of the learning process and academic activities, determining the state responsibility of the institutions of higher professional education before their founder” (Tajikistan, 2006). This different and in fact, a vague definition leave uncertainty and almost no opportunity for higher education institutions to practice their autonomy and accountability. Tajikistan is building Bologna structures mainly within the Ministry of Education and Science, instead of creating independent monitoring and implementation agencies. The recent educational strategies/documents have seen only a little progress toward decentralization and autonomy of universities, although these were announced as priorities of the reforms; primarily due to a highly centralized system and multiple layers of government which limits them from exercising autonomy and accountability (World Bank, 2014). Involvement of stakeholders such as students and employers in the governance of higher education institutions is also passive (World Bank, 2014). The appointment of rectors of universities strictly lies upon government decrees, which neglects the shared responsibilities of decisions making within universities. As a result, higher education institutions lack motivation and initiatives to reconsider their mission and develop institutional strategies.

The efforts to advance recognizable degrees and quality assurance remain complex. Although the government has taken steps to respond to the issues of the quality of education, they are yet to

comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. The accreditation and licensing of higher education institutions are still under the controlling organization of the Ministry of Education and Science that limits the progress toward a transparent and holistic approach in the quality assurance process. External independent accreditation, in general, is not favorable. Even the independent accreditation agency opened with the assistance of the TEMPUS program was not sustainable. The attempts toward transferring to a tiered structure of education in Tajikistan widely coexist with the previous (Soviet) degrees of *Specialist*. The distant/correspondent study practiced in the Soviet Union is still a significant part of the higher education system where the quality of education has been questioned for a long time. Besides, the lack of specific guidance in government policy surrounding “Bolognization” leads to great uncertainty among current faculty about how to actually implement reforms such as the new Ph.D. The creation of a centralized body under the government yet again carries more paradoxes in educational purposes and goals set in Tajikistan educational strategies. In sum, without decentralization, liberalization, and autonomy universities in Tajikistan may remain behind their counterparts and produce graduates with the skills, which are no longer relevant in a changing economy. In a globalized era, the human capital of the country may remain at high risk.

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