



# Outcomes of the Bologna Process in LIS higher education: Comparing two programs in Europe

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## KEYWORDS

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LIS education;  
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**Abstract** *Purpose:* The Bologna Process (BP) approach is distinguished by its emphasis on outcomes, moving the criteria for quality from input (what faculty teaches) to learning outcomes (what students will be able to do).

*Methodology:* The authors want to look at the issues and opportunities involved in applying the learning outcomes approach in two southern European countries with similar traditions and no previous experience of this approach. Data were collected from a documentary review based on official documents and open statistics and a survey of selected stakeholders connected to the LIS schools of Parma and Barcelona.

*Findings:* Within the BP framework, the LIS schools of Parma and Barcelona have distinctive missions and goals but differ in their approach to defining the attributes they expect of their graduates. Although LIS as an academic and educational undertaking has common historical roots in Spain and Italy, research and education since BP has developed in different directions. *Limitations:* Findings are based on the context of higher education in Italy and Spain, although the focus is on the two LIS schools of Parma and Barcelona.

*Originality/value of the paper:* There are definite barriers to using learning outcomes as a measure of quality enhancement for LIS educational programs. Not least is the challenge of developing a list of learning outcomes that stakeholders at both national and international level can agree on. Nevertheless, this study concludes that LIS learning outcomes in Europe should be investigated as a means of benchmarking and determining the feasibility of guidelines regarding the equivalency and reciprocity of professional LIS qualifications.

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## Introduction

Following the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (European Commission, 2012), interest in europeanization has grown mainly due to the Bologna Process (BP), with policies aimed

at creating an integrated European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The BP approach is characterized by the internationalization of generally nationally-based procedures (Knight, 2003), such as those for recognizing qualifications and assuring quality. Of the ten BP action lines, four could be classified as belonging to the objective of qualification

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recognition: mobility, recognition, joint degrees and European dimension. Five of the remaining BP action lines belong to the category of procedures for quality enhancement and educational reform: quality assurance, social dimension, employability, lifelong learning and the three-cycle degree architecture (Watcher, 2008). The central issue of the BP approach is how to develop “zones of mutual trust”, enabling European higher education staff and students to be more internationally knowledgeable and inter-culturally skilled. The activities of the BP to achieve transparency include tools such as the European Qualification Framework and other European standards (such as ECTS, Diploma Supplement, Europass, Dublin Descriptors, the three-tier course structure). The focus of the BP is the learning outcomes model. Europe is only now starting a move from input standards (in terms of course structure, content lists and contact hours) towards outcomes based on curricula and continuous outcomes assessment. After Bergen (ENQA, ESIB, EUA, & EURASHE, 2005), the BP focus on quality has been further clarified: the quality of teaching and learning is linked to the achievement of learning outcomes and to the application of the European Qualifications Framework. The certification and accreditation processes could be considered as two sides of the same coin, and the LIS sector (LIS = Library and Information Science) could also have a new role in this context (Tamaro, 2005a, 2005b). Learning outcomes are defined as (European Commission, 2005):

*statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning.*

The use of the verb “to do” in the definition underlines the aspect of competence or ability, rather than the way in which this ability is demonstrated. The use of learning outcomes is very closely linked to the adoption of a student-centred learning approach, with the role of the teacher moving towards being that of a facilitator/manager of the learning process. There is a consequent cascade effect that links the learning outcomes orientation to the selection of appropriate teaching and assessment techniques and the development of an appropriate curriculum design (Adam, 2004; Campbell & Van der Wende, 2000). It is also important that learning outcomes, however achieved, must be described and attested in such a way that they can be considered for recognition.

The Bologna Process (BP) learning outcomes model represents a pan-European movement aimed at improving the learning and teaching quality of university courses as seen from the student’s point of view, the student being considered the real protagonist of the reform (Adam, 2004). Apart from the general values of internationalization for promoting intercultural understanding and collaboration, there is now a growing need to prepare graduates for the global labour market and improve employability. In this approach the development of an international curriculum, as in the past, is not an end in itself but a means to develop the appropriate international competences in students, staff and teachers (Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002). As the emphasis on the learning outcomes of education grows, there is increasing interest in identifying international competences. This BP approach is surely of more relevance to the labour market and is also more flexible when taking into account issues of lifelong learning, non-traditional

learning and other types of non-formal educational experiences. The learning outcomes focus is based on important pillars of the Bologna reform:

- Lifelong learning scenario: the student/adult learners, from student to full professional status, should be able to trace their progress by identifying and recognizing the knowledge and skills acquired;
- Shift of pedagogy from teaching to learning: the students/adult learners have a more central role in the quality assurance process;
- Collaboration with employers: the need for dialogue among all stakeholders for course design and better employability.

There are still ambiguities in the learning outcomes approach as a whole, however. In practice it is not always clear what the LIS learning outcomes subject to evaluation are, and hence it is not easy to decide how they can be measured and assessed. This is more complicated now as one particular challenge currently facing LIS education is the need to address the education of future professionals in a field undergoing major change and rapid evolution.

The “*European Curriculum Reflections on LIS Education*” project (Kajberg & Lorrington, 2005) led by EUCLID, the European Association of LIS teachers, and coordinated by the LIS School of Copenhagen, has sought to define the professional role. An agreement has been reached on the core of the discipline: LIS has been defined as the “science” of organizing mediation, using the term science as a special kind of science in the sense defined by Ranganathan (Kajberg & Lorrington, 2005). This makes LIS studies a field which prepares students for practical work and for teaching and research in librarianship and the book trade, in archives administration, in museums or any other physical or virtual collection or archive-based activity – and also outside cultural institutions or organizations (Kajberg & Lorrington, 2005). A review of changing needs must, however, be carried out as regards different traditional and emerging roles, new working environments and new societal demands.

How is LIS education in Italy and Spain responding to this learning outcomes orientation? The BP has driven the learning outcomes approach, but a discussion between the LIS institutions and other stakeholders still needs to take place. From the literature review of the Bologna Process and LIS education in Europe, authors have tried to develop a theoretical framework including learning outcomes, learning and teaching, assessment methodologies and recognition procedures in Spain and Italy. In this paper the elements of the possible impact of the BP learning outcomes approach on the student’s learning are explored through analysis of the present situation in Italy and Spain, the aim being to try to offer suggestions that could bring about positive change in the LIS education context. The factors considered in this paper are the structure of LIS courses, the learning outcomes approach, accreditation and recognition.

## LIS education in Italy

Traditionally, higher education courses in Italy that include LIS subjects have focused on the domains of cultural heritage

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